

1

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

6/23/2002

Jeremiah 20:10-13 + Romans 5:12-15 + Matthew 10:26-33

Fr. Boyer

It is Jeremiah who speaks the first words to us today. For me and for St. Mark Parish it is blessing and a fortunate assignment of texts. Jeremiah is one of my favorite personalities of the Old Testament. He is a model for any who would seek to explore the prophetic call into which we are all baptized as a people of faith. He is a man of choices, who lives with courage his relationship with God: a man who grows, who suffers, who is thoroughly human, yet always tuned to the divine call, the Word of God, and prayer.

I am beginning a new time in my life. I come here this week grateful for you and the warm welcome you have extended with compassion and understanding. As a priest, I have moved only five times in 35 years. I tend to stay and go for the long haul. Three years at the Old Cathedral in Downtown Oklahoma City as my first assignment at twenty - five years of age. Four years at Mt. St. Mary High School as a teacher and administrator. Five years at St. Joseph Church in Union City. Six years at St. Thomas More Parish in Norman; and most recently fifteen years at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral in Oklahoma City. For fifteen¹ of those years, I was Director of Youth Ministry and Director of Vocations for fifteen years as well. I told the people last week at the Cathedral that I had begun to expect that my move from there would be announced in the Obituary column of the Daily Oklahoman, and that I would go out of there in a box rather than go out carrying boxes. Perhaps it shall be so here, but this move has been different from all the others because of so many of you. Never before have I anticipated a move with such a warm welcome. I received emails, phone calls, and hand written notes extending a welcome, offering to help with the physical side of such a move, and simple, personal kindness. I am deeply grateful, and you have revealed more about yourselves and the spirit of your parish than you might have imagined.

At the same time, I am sorry that you must go through a transition that you did not ask for, were not consulted about, and are left to work through on your own. It is not my style of leadership. I am uncomfortable with it, and you will find in time that what you think and how you feel matters to me. I shall listen to you. At the same time, as the leader I may not always choose to do what you want, but it will not be because I did not listen, and you will always deserve to know the reasons for my decisions even if they are contrary to your expectations and wishes.

What all of us have right now is an opportunity to grow, but it is a choice we can make, but growth does not happen unless we choose to make it so. We make choices every day. We choose whether to feed and exercise our body in a healthy way or let it grow old and frail. We chose whether to engage in community or to cultivate isolation. We choose whether to develop a healthy relationship with God through prayer and God's Word, or to fill our days with worldly activity. We choose whether to live "awake" by sharing and standing up for our beliefs and our faith, or to spend our days in slumber.

Most of the time, the choice to grow brings some pain. We're physically sore from a workout, emotionally confused, and sometimes spiritually uncertain. We might be called a "health-nut", a "crack pot", or worse. If our chosen lifestyle or spiritual path differs from that of family and friends, we risk ridicule, rejection, physical attack, and sometimes death. We hear this experience echoed in the today's readings from Jeremiah, Romans, and Matthew. Our God is one who encourages growth and has an endless supply of lessons for teaching us this fine art. Putting aside fear is the first step into the divine

classroom; and in its place, we are invited today to put faith. Rather than be sucked into the crises and drama of everyday life, of trying to control the people, places, and things in our life, with might with simplicity and love choose to grow.

I will take Jeremiah as a model for ministry and leadership here among you. I would like for his prayer to be our prayer today. It is a prayer of confidence and hope. It is a song of praise and thanksgiving. In one form or another, the words "fear" or "afraid" appear over 700 times in the sacred scriptures. In almost every case, the appropriate response to fear is faith: faith that trusts in and hopes in God's power to save, to deliver, and to protect. Jeremiah knew what it was to be afraid. His whole career was riddled with countless fearsome experience. He feared he was too young. He feared that he would not know what to say or how to speak to his contemporaries in God's name. He feared facing others with the truth of their sinfulness. He feared to speak God's Word. He feared not to speak it and when he did speak it, he feared the consequences.

Like Jeremiah, disciples of Jesus are charged with speaking God's word of truth, and like Jeremiah they often bare the brunt of disdain because of it. Yet Jesus sends them and sends us gifted with grace and a message to proclaim from the housetops. I ask you to come with me a little further into the deep water of discipleship and the prophetic life of faith. It is a faith that conquers fear, or at least keeps it at bay. Together, we can become prophetic and real deep-water disciples: "Fear imprisons, faith liberates, fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages, fear sickens, faith heals; and most of all, fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life, but faith rejoices in its God.

No Audio Available

2

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
6/30/2002

2 Kings 4:8-11,14-16 + Romans 6:3-4,8-11 + Matthew 10:37-42

Fr. Boyer

It is Matthew's community that speaks to us today - a community that has already chosen to follow Jesus Christ. They know the demands of that life style, and they know where it leads. Their story can and ought to be our story. These are a people who are not just followers of Jesus. They are a community growing more deeply into his life and have centered their identity upon the risen Lord. They know who they are because of what they have experienced in response to that Word not just because of where they hang out and whose company they keep.

The Word of God is their focus and the source of their identity. By that Word, they understand and interpret what happens to them. That Word is still among us, and just as it did with the community of Matthew, it has an impact upon us. It calls into question our perceptions and judgments. It checks our awareness. It intrudes upon and examines public policy, and it demands change in human behavior, ideas, and ethics. What Matthew's community says to us today concerns our relationship to the one we call "Lord." When we proclaim his words here it is not out of nostalgia, but our first and best way of coming to a deeper understanding of what it means to live in faith and be disciples. We proclaim these words of Jesus, not just to remember him, but to be drawn more deeply into his transforming presence.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of his promise to send the Holy Spirit has changed us from simple disciples who follow Jesus around through life into prophetic participants in his work and mission, and that is exactly what Matthew's tenth chapter is all about. It is about defining the mission of a prophetic church.

Pay attention to how Matthew articulates this mission.

Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet....

Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man.....

Whoever give a cup of cold water to a little one because they are little.....

We must find within ourselves the quality of the prophet before we can welcome the prophet.

We must be righteous before we can welcome the righteous.

We must be little in order to welcome the little ones.

We have to know what this is before we can really be one with the prophets, the righteous, and the little ones.

The hospitality this Gospel proposes begins within our selves. It is the prophet who best welcomes the prophetic, the righteous who best welcomes the righteous, and the little ones who best welcome the least among us.

Prophetic is what we are as God's people and disciples of Jesus Christ.

By God's own command the privilege and responsibility of the prophet is, according to Jeremiah, "to root up and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant." The prophet speaks in every season of human life giving comfort in sadness, courage in anxiety, affirmation in success, warning where virtue is lacking, and challenge where improvement is needed.

The people Jesus would have for prophets of the Kingdom of God are experts in humanity, people who know the depth of the human heart, who can share the joys and hopes, agony and distress of their companions in this life, and at the same time are people who have fallen in love with God. Prophetic

people reveal God's purpose. If God's purpose is to love, prophetic people love. If God's purpose is to forgive, prophetic people forgive. If God's purpose is to welcome all made in God's image into the Kingdom of God, prophetic people make it so in their own lives, in their own homes, in their own hearts.
No Audio Available

3

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/7/2002

Zechariah 9:9-10 + Romans 8:9-14 + Matthew 11:25-30

Fr. Boyer

Humor me while I demonstrate something to you.

(Hold a dissonant chord on the organ/piano an uncomfortably long time and then lift.) That is noise.

Now watch this.

(Play the same notes with some rhythm breaking up the chord.)

That is music. The difference between the two sounds is something called "rest." It makes music out of noise, and it is also what makes life out of time. One of my favorite definitions of life is what happens we are not at work. Rest is what Jesus speaks of today, and it is an essential element in the life of a disciple.

Deep within us there is a need to express and experience our relationship with God by making things "holy", but sanctifying them. It says as much about us as it does about God, but it is important, and when we do not have that experience, things go wrong. At a civic/political level, this is what reacts in us when we see the American flag burned and ripped apart. This is what reacts in us if we see a tabernacle violated and the sacred hosts trampled. It is what has led legislators to make the vandalism of a church or a cemetery a felony in civil law. In our effort to relate to and connect with God, human kind has always set aside things and places for exclusive use in communion with God. It is the same with time. From its origins, Israel was instructed to sanctify its time on this earth, to set some of it aside for exclusive use in communion with God. Israel called this time: Shabbat.

If there is to be a sacred place, like this church, in which only things related to God take place, then there must also be sacred time. Part of God's creative action was rest, the final act of creation. Since that divine rest was begun on the day after humankind was created, human existence itself cannot be imagined in a world where this is no Shabbat, or holy rest. As a lived experience, the word means "to cease" or "to desist." It calls for a break in routine and a period of holy rest that allows an invites us to enjoy God's world rather than do battle with it, to relax rather than struggle, and live in harmony rather than achieve domination.

Without rest there is no balance in life, no integration of one's gifts and relationships. This rest is what allows us to stand in the middle ground between the opposites and contraries that mark out lives so painfully. There is more to this rest than simply the interruption of work. It is an opportunity to celebrate what God has done and remember that it is God who is doing. Without this kind of rest, we are very likely slip into thinking that we are the ones who are in control.

In this stress-ridden world that is production driven, fast paced, and filled with workaholics, "rest" is looked at with suspicion. Many think of it as a waste of time, and they feel guilty if they are forced into it. "Time is money." Says one way of looking at life, and in that system, to waste time is to waste money, and to waste money is to fail. To this world, Jesus speaks today, and to those who would follow him and experience the Kingdom of God today and every day, rest has an important place in life. "Come to me", he says, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you...come to me and you will find rest for our souls."

To rest in Jesus does not mean to flop into an exhaustion-induced "coma", but rather to appropriate his mind, his wisdom and his strength. It is to drink deeply of the Spirit of Jesus and be renewed and refreshed. What Jesus speaks of empowers the disciple to compliment service with prayer, and

meaningful preaching with quiet thoughtfulness. It is a rest that allows the disciple to have values, rethink priorities, and adjust attitudes. It allows disciples to regroup and re-center themselves in him and in the cause of the Gospel. Understanding this Gospel and accepting the invitation of Jesus, silences the guilt and anxiety of unfinished work. Failure to hear what this gospel asks of us turns life into misery and little more than unfinished work that never sees an end, a purpose, or a value.

Those of us who will be disciples of Jesus, can be set free from slavery, and doubt, and worry that we have never done enough. We can be free of marking our worth and the value of others by things done rather than by what we are as children of God and be free to live in joy filled peace and loving kindness. This is the day of the Lord. It is the day we make holy. It is the time we set aside for God, for remembering God and for remembering our place and our share in God's creation. It is the day in which and by which we too are made Holy. Without it, we shall never be a holy people. With this gift of rest, God can write the music of our lives.

No Audio Available

4

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/14/2002

Isaiah 55:10-11 + Romans 8:18-23 + Matthew 13:1-23

Fr. Boyer

Bob Dylan wrote a short parable for the cover of his album John Wesley Harding. Three kings are trying to understand the new Dylan recording. They visit a wise man and ask him to tell them what it means. "How far would you like to go in?" asks the man. "Not too far." Reply the kings. "Just far enough to say we've been there."

"Just far enough to say we've been there."

It could be the story of our lives when it comes to the Kingdom of God. "How far would you like to go in?" It could be the story of our lives with the Word of God. Some will say, "Just far enough to say we've been there."

With these thoughts, we get an interesting "take" on the Parable today from Matthew 13. We are going to be in this chapter for the rest of this month, and I am wondering how far you want to go. You will not go far if you only hear it in here. THE PATH. You will simply be able to say you have been there.

If you pick it up and read it at home the rest of this month, you will have gone a little further. ROCKY GROUND AND THORNS.

If you read it, pray with it, listen to it, and it influences the way your live and what you do the rest of this month, you will have gone all the way in. RICH SOIL.

A parable that originally revealed something about the sower gets retold in the midst of a community that has begun to experience what Jesus himself knew first hand: the unyielding rejection of his works and words by the scribe, Pharisees and other religious authorities of his day; the superficial enthusiasm of the crowds who hung around when he fed them and entertained them, but were no where to be found when he didn't do what they wanted, his own family's misgivings about his mission, and the confusion and lack of comprehension on the part of his own closest friends and disciples. Talk about Rocky Ground and Thorns!

Between the time Jesus told a parable about a sower who was generous in sowing the seed far and wide, and the time Matthew took the story and retold it in the midst of their experience of rejection and misunderstanding and superficial commitments on the part of many, the parable becomes an allegory about the harvest. We would do well to embrace the whole picture from parable to allegory remembering the sower-God that Jesus reveals with an invitation to imitate that generous mission, and the soil into which it is sown with its encouragement to be rich soil - open to what is sown in our hearts, and anxious to see a great harvest spring for our faithful lives.

We are a believing community invited to be renewed in our efforts at hearing, bearing, and living in accord with God's good Word. Isaiah speaks to us today of the power of that Word to create, to inform, and to realize what has been promised. "How far would you like to go with that Word?" I ask you today. If you want to do more than simply say you've been here, then take no offense and be not surprised when it gets tough to be faithful to that Word and be recreated and reformed by it. The promise we proclaim on this day however, is that those who will go all the way in will know a harvest greater than ever before imagined. How far do you want to go?

No Audio Available

5

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/21/2002

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 + Romans 8:26-27 + Matthew 13:24-30

Fr. Boyer

"How far do you want to go?" was the question I posed to you last weekend. The lure of Chapter Thirteen continues with more parables of the Kingdom: parables that require some information leading to understanding for those who want to step more deeply into the Kingdom of God. Without that information, we are left with silly riddles that do little more than entertain like riddles do for those who enjoy superficial intellectual guessing games.

There is a distinction drawn all through this chapter between the disciples, who understand these parables and those others who are not given understanding. This distinction is at the heart of chapter 13. One group has gone in, the other is content to simply look, but as Jesus says, they don't see. Beneath these parables collected by Matthew and woven together to reveal the truth of God's working presence in our midst is the subtle invitation to move deeper into "understanding" which does not mean an intellectual awareness, but rather a commitment that involves faith and obedience, a moral commitment that involves our deepest selves. These are not parables that tell us how to live. They are not about what the Kingdom of God will be like in the future, but rather about what is happening right now. Since the Word of God is alive in our midst, these parables speak to us about this year and this very hour. These parables speak to our understanding.

We are warned today about the difference between simply "hearing" the Word of God and "understanding" it. The commitment to which we are called, the commitment, which is pure gift to those who want and seek it, is threatened less these days by persecution than by secular scorn. You know what that sounds like: "You don't really believe all that stuff do you?" For Matthew's crowd it was more political and physical persecution, for us, it is scorn and ridicule. The effect is the same. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches are still able to choke the word. If anything, this chapter ought to drag us to our knees and wrench from our hearts a prayer for the gift of understanding that what we believe with our minds might be acted out in our daily behavior. These parables challenge us to leave behind a pedestrian, pragmatic, everyday world that treats God as irrelevant or like a tamed mascot and enter a new world where God is the primary reality, where God is working even though human eyes cannot perceive the reality.

Let me leave you with one detail, one fact, which might bring these parables to life as they did those to whom they were first spoken. "Three measures of flour" could, in our time, be thought of as "three cups". But the fact is, "three measures" is actually about fifty pounds! With that much dough, bread for more than one hundred people would have come from her oven. It hints at the bounty of the heavenly banquet. It acknowledges that God, the leaven, is at work in ways no one can see, and reminds us that the outcome of God's activity is more and greater than we can imagine or accomplish on our own. This parable and the mustard seed parable insist that God's action in the world whether perceptible or not is nonetheless real and will in God's own time come to bear fruit. This Kingdom is not something that will suddenly appear full blown without some prior activity. It is happening right now.

In every case through chapter thirteen, the human response is a significant issue. Like buried treasure, God's activity is hidden and must be discovered. Like a pearl of great value, it must be sought in order to be found. The Kingdom of God is not something we acquire like a piece of real estate. It is not something

we possess, it is a sphere into which one enters. It is a participation in the rule of God that must be total. Those who want to be there, who want to participate in the Kingdom of God, must go all the way in. They cannot just see. They cannot just hear. They must understand. For that we ought to pray now and in the days to come.

No Audio Available

6

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/28/2002

1 Kings 3:5,7-12 + Romans 8:28-30 + Matthew 13:44-52

Fr. Boyer

Matthew comes now to the end of Chapter 13, and the next discourse is about to begin: a discourse on Discipleship. His Jesus has drawn us in side. The parable of seed sown everywhere was spoken to the crowds by the lake side, and the final parable of the net is spoken from within to those who have asked and sought the meaning of these parables and shown desire to find the kingdom of heaven. For some that effort is as easy as tripping over something that was right in front of them. For others, it is a labor of desire that goes on and on. In either case, we have learned that it takes "Understanding" that has nothing to do with cognitive awareness, but rather with a commitment to act out what we believe.

What Jesus hands on to those who have shown their desire to go in, to go deeper, to ask the big questions about the meaning of his teaching, and to seek understanding in the face of scorn and ridicule is WISDOM. It is his gift in Chapter Thirteen to those who will now become his disciple/companions. Be wise enough, says Jesus, to know that the reign of God is more important than any other value. Be wise enough to give yourself to that reign in all you are and all you do.

As the Gospel will continue to unfold, we shall see this Wisdom in Jesus. We shall see this Wisdom as Jesus personified. The Liturgy this day gives us hints from the Old Testament about this treasured gift in the story of Solomon. It urges us to be like the scribe at the end of this chapter who can reach into that Old Testament to bring forth this Wisdom and give it life in Jesus Christ.

This "Wisdom" is not the same as "Intelligence". Smart people are not necessarily wise people. Those who possess Wisdom know how to live, how to distinguish right from wrong, truth from a lie, what brings goodness from what brings harm, what is authentic and what is false. The Wise can recognize and pursue true and lasting values like the people in the story Jesus tells us today.

The mind, the heart, and the attitude of Jesus Christ must be ours if we are to be Wise and possess the treasure that he has come to give us in himself. In Him we shall become wise enough to serve others as he served, indiscriminately, without playing favorites, and always without judgment. This in the end is what it shall be to live in the reign of God. We shall take the long view in this world, looking toward what has begun among us and what it shall become. We shall judge the true value of everything and everyone in terms of eternity. In other words, what will this person, this experience or even this joy or this suffering mean to us at the end? Will it pass with us to the other side? If not, the wise will ask if it is worth all the effort, energy and attention we are tempted to give. We shall, if we become wise, leave most matters to God who is Wisdom and to Jesus who is Wisdom Incarnate. The more we put on Christ, the more wisdom we shall possess, and perhaps the best evidence of our growth in that wisdom is to ask for it in our prayer.

No Audio Available

7

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
8/4/2002

Isaiah 55:1-3 + Romans 8:35-39 + Matthew 14:13-21

Fr. Boyer

The first of two miracle stories is our focus in liturgy today; and after them comes a miracle of another sort. There is so much going on here! There has been a violent death in the family of Jesus. Herod has murdered John, the cousin of Jesus. In grief Jesus seeks solitude, but it isn't to be his. The crowds come on foot the long way around the lake, and his grieving time is cut short by a show of mercy and compassion. There is a triangle here of interaction: Jesus, the Disciples, and the Crowd. There is Jesus, there are those in need, and there are those in service.

Matthew has something to say about all three of them.

In Jesus we see compassion and mercy revealed through an act, a prayer, and a command that for any Christian of the Table is thoroughly Eucharistic. The verbs used here are not a coincidence: take, bless, break, and give.

In the crowd we see the world, hungry for Jesus, longing for food, searching for Messiah. They make every effort and try every way to find him, even when he seems to be in hiding. They are not disappointed.

In the disciples, we see ourselves. While there may be some of the "crowd" in us, let us not avoid the challenge of discipleship by being more comfortable among the crowd. Our search is over - we know who we are, we are here after all, in this church today. It is too easy to sit back and just be fed. It is time to go to work - to hear what he says to us. "Give them something to eat."

We see in these disciples something of ourselves, and we'll see it next week as well. "Five loaves and two fish is all we have." they say. "It is not enough." they think. All they can think about is what they do not have, and so they fail to see what they do have in the one who is with them. What an insight into human nature! Whining about what they do not have, these very human disciples, very much like us, do not see what can be done with five loaves and two fish and with Jesus Christ. If left to themselves, they will send everyone away in misery and disappointment and fend themselves; and they would never see what God can do.

Jesus will not let it be so. In the Greek version of Matthew, the command that Jesus gives them is the strongest and most harsh form of the verb. It is as though he literally screams at them: GIVE THEM SOMETHING! Stop whining about what you don't have! That attitude and a focus on what is lacking suggests that somehow God does not provide - and somehow what God does provide is going to run out, or be inadequate. Disciples of Jesus Christ cannot think that way or act that way.

God uses what we bring, but we cannot make manifest a God of compassion and walk in the footsteps of a merciful Jesus if we are holding out, holding back, fearful that we shall run out or not have what it takes. This Gospel goes to the heart of the matter when it comes to faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Those people trusted him - they went out of their way and sought him at great cost and great risk. The least they can expect is that disciples will give them what they have come to find. There is not a lot left over - there is no hint of abundance here if you understand the measure proposed. The little bit left over is not much when compared to the amount consumed. This Gospel does not talk about abundance and grand, huge, displays of some extra ordinary proportion. It talks about simple things like fish and bread the basic stuff of life. This Gospel talks about mercy and compassion, about the role of disciples, and about

their attitude and way of looking at what they have and why they have it. In the end, it is about little people and little things with which God will accomplish great things.

The miracle in this story may not really be what at first we thought it to be. The miracle here may not be about fish and bread, but about attitude and compassion, generosity and trust. I suspect that after the food was cleared away, the ones most touched, changed, and filled with wonder were the very ones who thought that they had nothing. The crowd just simply went away.

No Audio Available

8

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/11/2002

1 Kings 19:9-13 + Romans 9:1-5 + Matthew 14:2-33

Fr. Boyer

It takes some thinking to figure out where the miracle is.

It is not Jesus walking on water.

That image is an old one found in the Old Testament: in Job 9:8, Psalm 77, and Isaiah 43. God walks on water. No big deal here. That surprised nobody in Matthew's church who knew his or her scriptures.

Keep the story in context. We are dealing here with Food provided by God last week, and a water passage this week.

These are serious Exodus events: food in the desert, passage through water.

But there is a miracle here, and like last week, this one concerns a change in the disciples rather than something Jesus did. Last week they stopped their whining about what they didn't have and celebrated what they did have. This week think of it this way as I propose an alternate reading to this Gospel story, and you will get the point and see the miracle.....

"Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was, he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he turned around and swam back to the boat while the other disciples threw him a line and pulled back on board."

Or maybe it could go this way:

"Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid." Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you come over here and get in the boat."

The miracle here is not about Jesus. It is about a fisherman getting out of a boat in the middle of a storm, and what happens to him because of it. If he had stayed in that boat, or turned back when it got really scary, nothing would ever have happened. But he did not stay in the boat, and because he was willing to take the risk and get out; because he reached out to the Lord who was reaching out to him, Peter experienced the power of God, and for moment, I believe he stepped into the Kingdom of God.

Peter had to leave the boat and risk his life on the sea in order to learn both his own weakness and the almighty power of his Savior. Only by doing so did he come to faith. It cannot be different for us. We all sit in our little boats, thinking we are safe and sound, but those boats rock and they sink. They get swamped, and they turn over. The stock market fails us. Our houses burn down or blow away. Health fails. A loved one dies, or we find ourselves abandoned or divorced. Friends turn on us. We lose a job. We sit in our boats, and Jesus walks by, and he invites us to get out, because faith does not mean sitting and waiting. It means getting free from everything except God alone, knowing and acting as if only God can save, protect, and get us home.

The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus: "Come." The only possible way to be a disciple of Jesus is to take the step. We saw it last week when they were willing to find out what Jesus could do with what they had. We see it again this week as we discover what Jesus can do if we are willing to get out of the boat, so to speak.

The miracle at which we marvel this week is what God can do for those who will get out of their boats and reach out to the one who calls. The miracle is what happens to Peter or anyone for that matter who imagines that they are losing it all, and will reach and out and cry out: Lord, Save me."

The story ends with the winds dying down and the disciples bowing down before Jesus in adoration. In a historical sense, this does not make sense because Jesus has not yet risen from the dead. The title: "Son of God" could not have occurred to them yet, but Matthew gives us a glimpse of the end of time. Those who trust in God rather than their boats, those who reach out after responding to their call, are at peace. They shall be found in the Heavenly Kingdom.

None of us will ever know what God can do for us much less know what the Kingdom of Heaven is like unless we get out of the boat and go toward the Son of God.

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Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
8/15/2002

Revelation 11:19-12:6 + 1 Corinthians 15:20-27 + Luke 1:39-56

Fr. Boyer

Song, Prayer, and Scripture weave together to make this Feast

In some ways, they all three boil down to a lot of words:

words sung

words spoken

words heard.

As a result, I'm not sure we can really get the point.

It's almost as though there is simply too much here,
certainly too many words.

Words of John in the Book of Revelation,

words of Paul in First Corinthians,

words of Luke in the Gospel,

all trying to awaken in us the Spirit and Faith of this woman
whose faith and trust in God changed the face of the earth.

Luke weaves together a string of texts from the Psalms,
and he puts them in the mouth of this young Hebrew woman
in the story of her visit to Elizabeth.

It is a chapter filled with extraordinary poetry
when words and images dance with life and promise.

Among those words, leaping from the psalms come ten words that say it all,
that give purpose, meaning, and motive to our assembly today.

They are the reason why we are here today at noon and not having lunch
at mid - day on a Thursday in August.

They are the reason we are here tonight and not at home clearing the supper table.

They are the reason why we are here, in Norman, Oklahoma.

They are the reason for all that we do.

Many of us have learned by memory ancient prayers
and sacred words that have the power to turn our minds to God.

The Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Prayer before meals, the Act of Contrition, the Creed, the Memorari, the Angelus, and the list goes on into cultural traditions. Late in my life, I learned another prayer, Mary's prayer, more authentic, more deeply rooted in our Jewish/Christian tradition than any of the others.

It is prayer the Church lifts up to God every evening of every day.

It is the test of this day's Gospel.

If you haven't learned it, begin today.

If it seems too long to learn quickly, then get one verse and go from there.

Get it right, and say every day.

Simply speaking those words should pull us to our knees in humble gratitude, or bring us to our feet in wild joy.

The one verse that captures the spirit of the whole prayer

is the reason we are here today or tonight,
the reason we have come
to sing, to pray, and hear the Word of God.....

"God who is mighty has done great things for me."

If anyone asks you why you went to church today:

Or why you go to church every Sunday,

Why you give, why you pray, why you sing, why you have hope, or joy,
there is only response.

It is the reason for this day,

for this season,

for this place:

"God who is mighty has done great things for me."

No Audio Available

10

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/18/2002

Isaiah 56:1,6-7 + Romans 11:13-15,29-32 + Matthew 15:21-28

Fr. Boyer

It is the third of a series of miracle stories leading us to what is probably the most significant event in Matthew's Gospel outside of the Passion Narrative. It comes next week.

Like two before, this one is not what it seems to be on the surface. A deeper look at the text; the setting, the characters, the narrative conversation, and the interplay of words and deeds gives us reason to see and hear more than what Mark provides in his earlier telling of this story.

With Mark, it is a simple matter of a miracle cure.

With Matthew, we have reason to wonder: "Where is the miracle?"

There are seven verses here. Only one of them is devoted to a cure. Jesus says: "Let it be done for you as you wish. And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour." That's all there is to it.

But six other verses concern Jesus and the disciples revealing what may seem to be a rather shocking attitude of disinterest and dismissal.

The first clue that there is something really important here is the language. Matthew uses terms that are archaic for his time. Tyre and Sidon, Canaanite, Son of David, God of Israel: these terms are not in use at the time in which Matthew sets the story. It would be like referring to someone from the State of Georgia as a "reb" or a "Confederate." The only possible reason for using that kind of language would be to suggest some other inference or some other reference by the language. These terms in Matthew's text are old, out of date, and heavily rooted in Old Testament overtones that would suggest that the attitude here is an old one - an old prejudice that has been around for a long, long time.

Even Jesus seems subject to this prejudice. He doesn't look so good in this situation. The one who proposes leaving 99 and going after the 1 who is lost is about to pass by this woman without even a word. He won't even acknowledge her presence! The disciples, with the most disgraceful of motives, force him to deal with her because they're tired of her pestering. They don't like her either.

Now if you stand back and look at this picture, ask the question:

"What is more significant and surprising here,

the cure of this woman's daughter or the fact that Jesus and these disciples change their mind and decide to share what they have with someone they don't particularly care for?"

This is a miracle story all right, but it is not the miracle we might first suspect. While the story certainly has some historical elements, it reveals more about us, the early church, and Jesus Christ than we may be comfortable with seeing.

At the same time it reveals something of God as well.

Unpleasant as it is to admit, most of this world is under our table waiting for some scraps to fall. We are very conscious about what is ours, and we are very determined to keep it. This Jesus of history and his disciples are very conscious of their privileged position among the "Chosen People." They are Jews, not "Canaanites." They are very aware of their power and their privilege.

In the story, I believe they heard the voice of God. It sounded like a woman foreigner who came begging, not for herself, but for her child. The miracle is: their change. What they considered theirs alone, they decided to share, perhaps not for the best reasons at first, but eventually they got it right.

Perhaps we may be hearing the voice of God calling to us from under the table, across the boarder, or with an accent.

The miracle stories are not all told, and the best of them are not about healing. They are about conversions and changes in the human heart. They tell of enemies that begin to speak to one another, of ancient distrusts and prejudice collapsing in the face of grace and the real truth about our relationship to one another and our God.

Perhaps we might listen today very quietly and carefully to see if God is calling out to us, and hope that God has not and will not, like the woman of the Gospel, give up on us.

No Audio Available

11

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/25/2002

Isaiah 22:19-23 + Romans 11:33-36 + Matthew 16:13-20

Fr. Boyer

We stand in the face of raw power today.

It is a power greater than any known source of energy.

Greater than the universe and its boiling stars,

greater than the fusion of atoms,

greater than the wind and the sea and all that is in them,

It is the source of the greatest cures and miracles and healings.

It is the power exercised by Christ Jesus,

rooted in the faith, and given to those who will call it by name

and embrace its potential.

It is the greatest of the miracles.

It is greater than anything we've heard so far in Matthew's Gospel.

It is greater than water into wine or the raising of Lazarus.

It is greater than walking on water,

It is greater than restoring sight to blind people or strength to the lame.

It is the power given to those who have named Christ their Lord

and accepted the new identity that Christ has come to bestow upon his believers.

It is the power of Forgiveness.

The greatest weapons used by the greatest armies have no power to bring peace. The power of wealth, privilege, and position are inadequate. We cannot buy, bribe, force, nor reason our way to peace in Ireland, the Middle East, Central America, in our families, between friends, nor in our hearts. It only has one source: Forgiveness.

The power of forgiveness is the gift Jesus provides in the Gospel today. It is the turning point of Matthew's Gospel. Having been dazzled and awe struck by the things that Jesus has done, we will, in the weeks to come shift our attention toward Jerusalem and what will happen there. The seed is planted in us that bears fruit in understanding the Passion and Death of Christ as he experienced it and rose from it. The power he had to rise above the betrayal, the abandonment, the hatred, the questioning of his motives and sincerity, his own wonder about God's care for him all are wiped away by the power he used as he was nailed to a cross: "Father, Forgive them."

We are a church, as Matthew says, founded by and upon the power of forgiveness. Not one of the apostles more clearly models that truth than Peter, who no sooner answers the question: "Who do people say that I am?" than he says in the courtyard of Pilate: "I do not know the man." Peter, and you and I know about forgiveness. We want to have it all the time, but are often too give it. We are church gifted with an ancient and wise tradition rooted in a ritual we fail to use wisely. Lately some have chosen to hide in the crowd and enjoy the convenience of "Communal Penance Rites" and while those rites might well maintain a level of communal prayer and demonstrate our public confession of need; they leave unattended a greater need of confession. I have often found it curious that many find healing and discover the deep meaning of the Incarnation not in their churches, but in A.A. or other Twelve Step Programs where they come to the awareness of God's healing presence in the confessing

community of those who dare to search for healing.

None of us can really feel loved and cared for when we have to hide our sins and failings. The expression of love from another gets blocked when our minds say: "If you only knew the feelings I have sometimes or the things I've done, you wouldn't be saying you loved me.

Even in our relationship with God, there is forgiveness to share, and I've come to discover in recent years that it isn't bad to forgive God now and then and keep alive a relationship of love and trust.

"I will give you the keys." says Jesus.

With them, we can unlock more than the Kingdom of Heaven.

We can open the human heart and the wounded soul.

We can open the boundaries of hatred and dissolve generations of memories that retell and repeat atrocities of the past.

We can recreate broken friendships and restore unity.

Best of all, with this gift and this power,
we can endure every trial, know peace and embrace love.

No Audio Available

12

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/1/2002

Jeremiah 20:7-9 + Romans 12:1-2 + Matthew 16:21-27

Fr. Boyer

It would be easy to think that this Gospel is about Peter,
but I don't think so.

The easy way is rarely the right way, or the way that is going to take us deeper
into what is revealed or into what God is saying to us through His Word.

It is more difficult to focus on Jesus in these verses than on Peter.

We understand Peter's reaction. It is our own.

Nothing in his history; nothing in his scriptures; nothing in his tradition
prepared him for a Messiah/Hero who would suffer disgrace.

We do not connect with Peter here.

There is nothing to be gained by identity with him or his attitude.

We know things differently. We have seen and come to believe in the Messiah, Jesus.

We are not invited by this Gospel to follow or imitate Peter,
but rather, Jesus Christ.

In the structure of Matthew's Gospel, the very next story is the Transfiguration;
but up to this point, Peter is in the dark.

He has no clue about how things are going to work out.

We do.

Jeremiah is the clue that opens this Gospel for us
and shifts our focus from Peter to Jesus.

He is the prophet who meets opposition, is ridiculed and mocked,
yet stays with God's plan because in the first chapter of Jeremiah God says:
"...have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you."

So the task we find in this text is to focus on Jesus Christ,
to wonder how he was able to remain faithful,
and then draw from his story

the strength, the knowledge, and the understanding to do the same.

We must avoid the temptation to trivialize or minimize his trust in God
by the thinking that because he was Divine, he had it made.

The Divinity of Christ did not keep him from fear, doubt, or anxiety.

Minimizing his full humanity robs this text
of its power to transform and encourage us.

Just as Peter had to surrender his preconceived ideas about a messiah,
we must surrender any idea that proposes that good, holy, just, and faithful people
should be free of suffering, free of fear, and free of doubt.

If we live in this life, we are going to know those things,

and having terrible things happen does not mean that we are bad, being punished, or that God has
turned away from us.

In the face of tragedy and suffering there is no reason to think God has left us.

On the contrary, these times are the greatest occasions to discover just the opposite.

That is what Jesus found, and what Peter had to learn.
He learned it by going to Jerusalem with Jesus.
He learned it by going all the way,
and losing his life in order to find it, just as the master did before him.

"Losing" one's life does not always mean the ultimate act of martyrdom.
None of us lives a day without losses.
Things do not happen the way we had planned.....
People do not say what we expect.....
Disappointments and frustrations pile up,
and the best made plans fall apart.
Large and little losses can make those who bear them bitter
and cause them to complain that life is not fair.
But this is what we learn from Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.
Losing one's life can mean finding one's soul.
These losses can set us free,
and when we are free like Jesus to surrender to and embrace the will of God,
we shall know what Jeremiah knew, believed and lived:
that there is no reason for fear because God is with us.
No Audio Available

13

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/8/2002

Ezekiel 33:7-9 + Romans 13:8-10 + Matthew 18:15-20

Fr. Boyer

In Roman Catholic tradition, the "REAL PRESENCE"

is a significant issue.

It is a matter of faith.

Yet for many that idea is focused only on the Sacrament of Eucharist;

To leave it there,

to think that this is the only "REAL PRESENCE"

is to live one's faith in a very passive and very incomplete way.

The promise of Jesus recorded for us in Matthew 18

is a promise of presence,

but it is not a presence reserved only for the Eucharist.

It is a presence to be felt deeply in the human heart,

acknowledged humbly in human life,

and celebrated joyfully in the reconciliation of those who have been isolated, alienated, and broken by sin.

I would suggest to you

that Matthew is proposing that the experience of real presence

that Jesus offers is first to be found in forgiveness.

Those of us who have known in our lives the experience of reconciliation,

the overwhelming peace and powerful joy that fills the human heart

at the moment of reconciliation with another

have known the presence of Christ

as really and as surely as anyone.

They have seen the victory of love over anger and hate and hurt.

This world and this church are filled with people who long for the presence of Christ; who seek him; who have felt his absence; who know the suffering of alienation and estrangement.

Some in this world seek him, or what Christ provides

in money, power, prestige, and privilege.

Some come here week after week to begin their search for God,

to sustain and renew it, or to bring it to a joyful close.

No matter where, the longing and the search for God continues

day in and day out.

What we proclaim as church,

what Matthew announces as Good News

is that it is possible to know the real presence of Christ,

and we may live in that presence by the power of forgiveness.

The heart of the Gospel text that we proclaim this day

is the remarkable promise of Jesus:

"Where ever two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst."

Do you hear that ancient Biblical language: "I AM?"
This is Matthew - Old Testament images and references are important.
This is "I AM" speaking - this is "I AM" revealing where he is to be found.
This promise is not simply about the power of prayer,
but in the context of this Gospel, much, much more.
Sin isolates and estranges us from one another.
It leaves us in alone and impossible to "gather as two or three."
Reconciliation breaks through that isolating barrier,
and in that coming together, "I am in your midst."
This promise is not a recipe for prayer.
It is an invitation to discover the presence of Christ.

The very identity of and essence of Church is found in the reconciling
experience.
Forgiveness and Healing is what we are,
and it is where we first discover
the one for whom we long in the depth of our hearts.
Reconciliation is the ministry of Jesus Christ.
It is where he is to be found
and where His glory will first be discovered.
Only after there is reconciliation can we move into the union and peace
of the Eucharist.
In ritual this is why we begin with: "Lord Have Mercy".
In ritual it is why we reach out to each other in peace
before we come to the altar.
To do this in ritual, it must be so in life itself.
In as much as we are reconciled and at peace with each other,
we shall be in the Presence of Christ.
No Audio Available

14

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/15/2002

Sirach 27:30-28:7 + Romans 14:7-9 + Matthew 18:21-35

Fr. Boyer

The final verses of Matthew's "Discourse on the Life of the Church" are the sum and substance of it all

for those who would count themselves among the saved, the faithful, and the loved.

From what has just been said, and we heard it last week and the week before, we are not to be soft on sin,

and there is no reason to think that "mercy" means looking the other way or that it proposes some kind of "denial" in the face of evil.

On the contrary.

The church has been given a step-by-step instruction on what to do and how to respond.

The final verses here before Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem address what happens when the sin has been named, and the sinner has been identified.

These verses serve as a corrective against a too zealous application of the earlier verses.

They serve as check against continuing the wrongdoing by repeating the offence in a spirit of revenge or by an effort to "get even."

Pay attention to the parable.

The one forgiven his debt turns right around and does what he has been forgiven for doing.

He ends up trading places with the other man!

This Gospel is about revenge and the foolishness of calling it "justice."

This Gospel insists that for those who would be "church"

for those who would be one with Jesus

forgiveness is about the future, not the past.

There is no future if the sin is repeated.

If someone smacks you in the face and you smack them back, there is no future without the offence. It has just continued.

If someone takes a life, and we take one in punishment, we've made no progress toward ending the sin.

Forgiveness is about ending the sin, stopping the evil, having a future.

This forgiveness Jesus speaks of is a process, not a feeling.

To be a forgiver does not always mean that we shall feel good.

It means we make a choice to stop the evil in its tracks and not become part of its story.

It means we chose to be guided by another force and use another power.

As is clear from the earlier verses,
forgiveness in the Christian heart is part of conversion.
It goes on and on and it has more to do with what we are becoming
than what we have been.
The reconciliation to which we are called
has as much to do with inner peace
as it does with external unity.
At its most basic level, forgiveness occurs within the heart and mind
of the one who was wronged.
This level of forgiveness involves replacing thoughts of anger and revenge
with a simple desire for the other's well-being.
That is where forgiveness begins.
Genuine forgiveness is a movement of grace
that takes us beyond the limits of human justice.
Doing the work of forgiveness is an ongoing process we repeat seventy-seven times.
It requires courage, understanding, and wisdom:
"Gifts of the Spirit" for which we ought to pray.
This would be a good time for that prayer,
and Matthew suggests it would be a good time to begin -
not with the sentimental toleration of hurtful behavior,
not with ignoring offence too often and too quickly,
but with looking within ourselves
to honestly inquire about our own participation or contribution to the conflict, surrendering the fantasy
of our own perfection,
and humbly embracing the truth that we are all made from the same clay.
Forgiveness then is about the future.
It creates for us a reason to hope.
It provides for us a taste of the Kingdom.
It secures for us a measure of peace and gives us reason to rejoice.
No Audio Available

15

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/22/2002

Isaiah 55:6-9 + Philippians 1:20-27 + Matthew 20:1-16

Fr. Boyer

"The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner.....

that is the point of this parable, a landowner.

It has nothing to do with wages, work, hours, or justice.

It has to do with the landowner - God.

It tells us about God, and in so doing,
we find out something about ourselves.

It does not explain divine justice,

but stirs us to wonder about how God acts toward us.

Even adjusted to the time and place in history from which it comes,
the story makes no sense.

After all, what employer who was going to do what this one did
would have the ones who worked the longest hang around
to be paid last and see what was going on?

He would have paid them first and had them out of there
so they would not see what those who came last received.

This behavior makes no sense unless you are Matthew's Jesus
and want to stop people in their tracks and leave them wondering.

Wonder, we should, at this story of God's care for us.

The trouble is, we don't wonder.

We are too busy looking around at everyone else.

Instead of being focused on God,

and living in that provident, loving friendship,
we are comparing and competing, day in and day out.

Instead of living with our gaze on the source of all that we have,
we are looking to see who got what, how much, and when.

Echoes of our childhood are heard in our whining.

"It's not fair! He got a bigger piece.!"

"How come he gets to stay up longer than me?"

Sometimes the laments are unspoken, but heard nonetheless.

The rejection comes from a job we wanted.

Someone we know gets more financial aid for school,
and we need it more.

Someone else gets a raise, and their work isn't as good as ours.....

Toxic thoughts that get internalized and lead to depression and anger.

A parable about God gives us reason to think about ourselves.

A parable about God calls into question the ideology of entitlement
and uncovers our self centered, self serving, competitive vision of things.

But the Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner, it says.

And the landowner is the one we should leave here thinking of.

If the parable is true, it leaves us humbled, embarrassed by our whining, and stunned once again by grace.

Few of us have earned a full day's wage;
and I suspect that those who have
would think they had not done enough.

The question asked in the parable is probably one being asked again today: "Why are you standing around all day idly?"

It's a loaded question that invites us to take a long look
at what we do all day.

When you think about how far we still have to go
to establish the Kingdom of God;
we know there is work to do in the vineyard.

The work of Justice, the work of Peace, the work of Forgiveness,
the Work of Healing and Reconciliation.

Probably if we were not so worried about what everyone else has,
concentrated a little more on what we do have and what we can do with it because of the one who gave
it and called us to use it,

there would be a lot less anger, resentment, and jealousy
spoilng our days in the vineyard.

The results of those days would certainly be more productive.

Then when we saw God's gifts lavished on others
we could rejoice with them and for them.

In moments of clarity and honesty, we ought to breathe a sigh of relief,
for when we look honestly at how we often think and behave,
and then remember that God's thoughts are not our thoughts
and God's ways are not our ways,
it's probably a good thing!

This Parable is about God and about us.

It is not about anyone else.

It is about the awe we experience when we think of how God cares for us,
and it is about our work in the vineyard.

No Audio Available

16

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/29/2002

Ezekiel 18:25-28 +Philippians 2:1-11+ Matthew 21:28-32

Fr. Boyer

The entry to Jerusalem is complete. The palms are cleaned up. The Hosannas have echoed away. Jesus has made a mess in the Temple, and the authorities are demanding to know who he thinks he is. Tension is building that will eventually explode in a hostile confrontation. The vineyard is the focus of conversation. We heard it last week and again this week, and we shall hear of it again next week before we go to a wedding. All are full of hard sayings to those authorities who are closed to any action of God they cannot control.

This parable is a strange one, because neither of the two options presented are perfect. There are always three levels to the parables we proclaim: the original level at which the historical Jesus is the teaching Rabbi at a certain time in a particular place. The second level is where we find the evangelist; in this case Matthew retelling the parable at another time to a totally different audience. We are the third level: another time, a different place, and different audience.

Jesus addresses those confrontational Pharisees who remain closed to his ministry and the slightest change in the way God may be working. Matthew addresses the Jewish Christians struggling for their identity in the face of the Jewish communities emerging from the chaos of the Temple's destruction. Today the parable is proclaimed in Norman, Oklahoma and everywhere else in the world this autumn day by a church stunned by its own sins against justice, children, and its own servants.

We have every reason to look at this family and wonder if the father might not have another son or two. If parables are supposed to move us to wonder, in this age we might then wonder if there could not be another option or two. Neither of these two sons is an example of what we want to be, and even though Matthew uses the parable as a story of conversion's power when it comes to the work of the vineyard, many of us listen to this story from a much deeper spiritual level and don't care to identify with either of them. Beside that, this Father, God, has plenty of children who say "No" and mean "No." Another issue of wonder is how we are we to live with them?

The best option is not even offered, but perhaps we ought to wonder about it, and the wonder stirred by this parable might lead us there. There is the option of saying, "Yes". It is, in the end, a parable about promise and performance; about words and deeds giving us cause to wonder about perfection and what it might look like for us who seek to do the Father's Will.

True disciples are distinguished from false disciples by what they do, not by what they say. All the power in this world and the next means nothing; knowing all correct theology and making oneself look pious and perfectly orthodox means nothing. Doing the Will of God is what brings in the harvest from this vineyard. Our integrity as disciples of Jesus and as a church has to do with what we do when no one is looking. That is my favorite definition of integrity. It means we have integrated what we say with what we do, and the two have finally become the same. It has nothing to do with who is watching or what anyone is going to think. It has to do with backing up what we say with what we do, and that is the style of the third son we do not meet in this parable, but are left to wonder about. The third son - who says yes, means yes, and goes out to do his best. It's a great ideal - integrity of this sort. My own experience is that only God pulls it off perfectly. God's Words are Deeds. God speaks and something happens. Only

God perfectly achieves this unity of word and action, or action that becomes one word: Love. But the children of this God strive to achieve this perfection, and this is the offer of this parable, that like the others says as much about God as about anything else.

Our prayer today springs from this parable and it is a prayer that we shall be worthy of the work to which we are called, that we shall become more and more a people of integrity, and open ourselves to the possibility that God can work and is working in ways we do not understand, and with people whose presence in this vineyard may surprise us.

No Audio Available

17

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/6/2002

Isaiah 5:1-7 + Philippians 4:6-9 + Matthew 21:33-43

Fr. Boyer

Back in the vineyard, a parable invites us to wonder about something, and I want suggest that it's focus is God. The easy way with this parable is be threatened by the behavior of the tenants so that we do not act like them, or to see an image of the Passion of Christ in the owner's Son. All of these work at one level or another, but if we stay with our level and raise the issue of what this parable says about God, something different happens. We are then left to wonder - to wonder about God, and that's a good place to be today.

There is a historical way of looking at this parable that excuses the behavior of the tenants. If we knew anything about their condition and the customs of the time, their revolt might be justifiable. There is another level that gives us reason to consider this son and his relationship both with the father and with the tenants. Finally there is the level that leads us to realize that the one constant in all levels and in every episode of this story is the landowner.

If we stay at our level of this parable, we can maintain our focus on the landowner and do some serious wondering at which point the living Word of God brings us to life. It is a story about being entrusted with a role in the vineyard by God. It leaves us to wonder what happens when those entrusted with something try to possess it and keep it as if it was their own. The gift turns to greed, and service in the vineyard to violence. Something is wrong here, and we need to wonder about it.

If you read very carefully this story of the heartbreaking betrayal of God and of terrible violence toward his slaves and his son, there is no suggestion that God is violent nor that God responds violently. That idea comes from the betrayers themselves. They are the ones who suggest that God will be angry and violent, not Jesus nor Matthew. So full of their own violence, so permeated in mind and heart are they, that they cannot imagine a God who is any different from them. They suggest the ending to this story, and Jesus never says it's the right ending - he simply talks about rejected stones and insists that those who produce fruit in the vineyard will come into the Kingdom of God. So as always, wondering about God leads us to understand something about ourselves.

This is a parable that says a great deal and raises a lot of questions in a violent nation that looks to violence as a greed driven solution; to a culture so permeated with violence that it no longer can conceive of any other option to conflict; and to a people who continue to shape the image of God in their own likeness. It is a parable that gives wonder to anyone who has forgotten their role in the vineyard and has begun to think of possessions as their own and consider ways of making it so. The persistence and the eventual victory of God's plan is clearly announced by this parable with the hope that their hearts of stone will be turned into the cornerstone; something that would be wonderful to behold and to celebrate. We are left to wonder when and how it shall come to pass, and what we should be doing in this vineyard to produce this fruit.

No Audio Available

18

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/13/2002

Isaiah 25:6-10 + Philippians 4:1-9 + Matthew 22:1-14

Fr. Boyer

For Jesus it was a parable that left people wondering and asking questions of themselves. He jump-started their imaginations, and he left those who listened with questions about how the Kingdom of God might be like that for them.

For Matthew it was an allegory that interpreted their own history in light of their relationship to God and what was revealed to them.

For us it could be either, but if we choose to take the allegory, we run the risk of interpreting it to justify ourselves leaving things as they are.

The parable Jesus told probably ended with the banquet hall being filled.

The scholars propose that Matthew added the visit of the King to the banquet hall and his inspection of the guests. Matthew was concerned with things eschatological - anticipating the end of time.

So our best option is to take this a parable and include Matthew's conclusion and have our imaginations stirred up and raise a few questions about the Kingdom of God might be like that for us.

The last verse is the point at which our wonder begins: "Many are called. Few are chosen." In the context of the story, it begins to suggest that none of us can hide in the group, slide in on the coat tails of others, or escape some accounting for our own stewardship when the time comes for the King to enter the banquet to which we have been invited. This is not a saying intended to forecast the proportion of the saved to the lost, nor frighten us with the thought that the odds are against us, but simply encourage vigorous efforts to live in accord with the teaching of Jesus. The garment we put on is Christ Himself: clothed in mercy and compassion, kindness, love, and forgiveness. It is garment of generosity and gratitude that never allows the wearer to forget where they are and where they came from.

The call of God is not something we respond to once and then sit secure and confident until it's all over. Each of us hears the call every day in the unique events that mark our individual lives, and the parable invites us to take a look at how we are dressed --- at how we have put on Christ. Jesus knew that everything he had came from the Father. Expressing that truth was the heart of his prayer and the motive of his life. It made him servant and it made him obedient. It made him grateful and it made him faithful.

It's autumn now. The days are growing darker; the last of the harvest is in the barns. The north winds and early nights speak to something deep within us about change and readiness for what is to come. The parable today leaves us to wonder about what we have put on for this feast of God's Kingdom, and how we shall look on the Day of the Lord. There is some higher calling revealed in this Gospel. Just being here, taking up space in this church is not enough. Something more is required of those who come, and today is as good a day as any to ask what it might be.

No Audio Available

19
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
10/20/2002

No Audio Available

Exodus 22:20-26 + 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 + Matthew 22:34-40

Fr. Boyer

We must consider Mark's earlier use of this story to understand what Matthew may be doing with it. Matthew changes the questioner, because in Mark's version, it is a scribe who asks the question and is impressed with the response. In Matthew there is no room for this friendly question and the compliments that arise from the conversation. In Matthew, a question asked earlier has dismissed the Sadducees, and these Pharisees have, in a sense, rolled up their sleeves and said: "We're the "pros" at this. Let's go after him." As a contest of wits, it's a draw. Jesus does not answer the question. They ask for one commandment, he gives them two.

In the end, what we inherit here and what we proclaim today is not about them, Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, or Jesus. It is about us, and it is about what is asked of us.

The story of this encounter reveals just how theology and ethics have integrated. When the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel says that Love of God and Love of Neighbor are "like", he reveals how much the relationship with God (call it "theology") and the relationship with neighbor (call it "ethics") have in common. The relationship of the divine creator and created is the stuff of theology, while the relationships between the created is the stuff of ethics. For followers of Jesus, these two relationships integrate into a balanced and focused way of life that is profoundly spiritual and consistently ethical as a consequence of their integration. The inter-relationship of these two commandments is an issue here. To enter into the mind of Jesus on this matter, think for a moment of how he treated the Sabbath Law. Remember how he insisted that human need took precedence over the legal requirement. That is the integration to be found in followers of Jesus. He did not come to replace the law, but to fulfill the law - a fulfillment to be found in the ethical behavior of his followers in their relationship to one another. Love for neighbor teaches us how to love God. Then Jesus goes a step further and radicalizes this love of neighbor to include enemies. It only makes sense to those whose love for God empowers them to imitate the generous, inclusive love God has for all creation.

But the story of this encounter also raises the question of commandments. If a commandment is the requirement or the prohibition of some kind of behavior, then we have to wonder if "love" can really be commanded. At this point, we must deal with the word that carries the idea. "L.O.V.E. in English is not a good tool to communicate what the Sacred Scriptures are revealing as God's Will or God's Command. That four letter word is simply inadequate. What is asked of us by God's command has nothing to do with warm feelings either of gratitude toward God or of affection for others. In fact, the Biblical concept of Love bears little resemblance to romance, affection, and warm feelings of intimacy. It looks more bull-headedness, stubbornness, and unwavering commitment. It isn't nearly as much fun, and when the Bible speaks of love, rather than violins playing, drums should be pounding.

Commitment, unwavering, immovable, unbending, teeth gritting, jaw set commitment is what this is all about. Nothing else, and commitment can be commanded. And so, commitment to God as a commandment means there will not be any other one, and no created thing nor any created person will take that God's place before us. Such commitment is observed in obedient behavior and a determined effort to fulfill the will of God, as it is known. Commitment to neighbor, says Jesus, has nothing to do with liking the neighbor, nor with warm and affection feelings. For followers of Jesus Christ, love of neighbor means imitating God - which translated into human behavior means taking the neighbor's

needs seriously. It means seeing the needs of the neighbor as though they were one's own. Where there is need for Justice, it is not someone else's responsibility. Where there is hunger, homelessness, loneliness, or any other need, it becomes my need because that is how God sees it.

It is the risen Christ who speaks in this room today revealing as always what God asks of us. It is commitment. It is single hearted, pure intentioned loyalty. When commitment is given without condition, every other relationship is affected. What God takes seriously, we take seriously. What God plans, we plan. What God does, we do: from giving to forgiving, from finding to seeking, from suffering to dying, and from binding up to setting free.

There is reason to rejoice here today and throughout this week because a commandment is given - not as a burden or as a way to limit or restrain us, but to set us free to be ourselves in the image of our creator and to love without limit, without condition, and without end. That is the essence of the covenant we share and renew at this altar: bound to God and to each other we are here in holy communion.

No Audio Available

21

All Saints

11/1/2002

Revelation 7:2-4,9-14 + 1 John 3:1-3 + Matthew 5:1-12

Fr. Boyer

It is Matthew who speaks to us today with his unique vision of the Kingdom of God shaped by the adversity his church experiences historically. Later, when another generation has passed and a wider experience of the community's life allows, there is different focus to the words of Jesus we proclaim today. It even changes location in Luke. The mountain is leveled, and the prophetic parallel with Moses is no longer important in the Lukan vision of life for the citizens of the Kingdom and those who would be one with Christ Jesus.

The location from which these words of Jesus were spoken is the least of the differences however. Matthew's additions and shift in emphasis says far more. Blest are you poor, the reign of God is yours, says Luke. Blessed are the poor in spirit, says Matthew. Blessed are you who hunger, you shall be filled, says Luke. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, says Matthew. A shift from the passive to the active is found in Matthew. He urges activism. Hunger and thirst become verbs. Matthew speaks of action: Don't just be hungry - thirst for it - go after it, seek it! There is an ethical side of Matthew's proclamation of these words of Jesus that urges the Blessed into action for the sake of the Kingdom of God. For these blessed, the kingdom of God is not just something they inherit because they are there and identified by the one who passes on the reward. Being blessed is a sign of God-given status not an affirmation of character. The Blessed for Matthew are not simply those who are hungry and wait without complaint; but rather they are the ones who, in a sense, chose to fast and discipline themselves for the sake of bringing justice for those who have no choice but be hungry.

This is what we call to mind on All Saints day; not just those who have been found blessed by reason of their place in time and the conditions of their lives, but those who take action for the sake of others, those who hunger, thirst, mourn, show mercy and make peace. This too is holiness, and for those have choices in life like you and me, the call to holiness is a call to action and service. If persecution leads one to reward, our persecution will have to come from what we have done not from the color of ethnic origins, economic condition, sexuality, and nationality. We will have to be persecuted for what we have done. We are not going to ride or slide into the Kingdom of God because of our helplessness. We will have to work our way there, and Matthew gives us the tools and points the way.

No Audio Available

22

All Souls

11/2/2002

Daniel 12:1-3 + Romans 6:3-9 + John 6:37-40

Fr. Boyer

Roman Catholics often visit a church to be alone with God, and in a Protestant church they have a feeling of emptiness. I often look into open churches, and I do not remember a time I have ever seen anyone praying alone in a Protestant Church. It may be a coincidence of my timing; but I am not mistaken about my feelings. There is no sacrament reserved there, and that does affect my feelings about the space. This is not the experience of Byzantine Christians. When they enter a church they do not proceed to their private prayers at a central altar or tabernacle without first going round to visit the icons. They kiss them and light candles before them. They salute them and join in communion with them. The walls of their churches are covered with images of patriarch and prophets, preachers and teachers. They rub shoulders with local saints and national martyrs. Their family histories are filled with songs and hymns and legends to tell again and again in every generation, for in telling them, they recall the acts and blessings of God.

That is what we do here on this Feast of All Souls. Devotion to the saints and to the dead are really the same thing; the sense of unity with a common past that is so strong in the worship of the East. Those we remember today do not cease to exist because we cannot see them or know their presence through our senses. They live as always, but without this frame of flesh and blood with which they approached and held correspondence with us. The life they have now is present, not future, past, nor distant. It is not above the sky, it is not beyond the grave, it is now and here; the Kingdom of God among us.

John Henry Newman in a sermon left behind these thoughts to make sense of this day. "We are looking here for the coming of the day of God, when all this outward world, fair though it be, shall perish; when the heavens shall be burnt, and the earth melt away. We can bear the loss, for we know it will be but the removing of a veil. We know that to remove the world that is seen will be the manifestation of the world that is not seen. We know that what we see is like a screen that hides from us God and Christ, and the angels and the saints."

We sit today in their presence. They surround us and bear us up as they always have and always will. We share with them a common beginning in mind and in the heart of God; and we shall share with them a common eternity in the arms of that God who calls us all his own.

No Audio Available

23

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

11/3/2002

Malachi 1:14-2:10 + 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13 + Matthew 23:1-12

Fr. Boyer

The disputes are at an end.

Jesus alone speaks, and now he speaks to his disciples: to you and to me.

He is still in the Temple where he was confronted by first one group and then another.

These groups: Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, are all part of the hierarchy that has too much to lose by his teaching.

They have all been dismissed, and now, still in the Temple

with all the authority the place itself can give, he speaks to his disciples,

Then at the end of this chapter he will leave the Temple.

This is a kind of final instruction, a wrap up of all that has been said, the last words of direction to set us on our mission.

As always, the focus and the issues

reveal a great deal about the church of St. Matthew

which was obviously beginning to struggle with internal disorder from what we would today call: "clericalism."

These words stand as a reminder to the church in every age

that pride, privilege, and power are not tools for the building of the Kingdom, but tools of its destruction.

There is danger in this text taken and clipped out of context as it is.

It is the danger of standing back and thinking that it is all about them:

all about those Scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees,

or all about that early church creeping into clericalism

with abuses frequent enough that Matthew thought he should raise this warning.

Buried in all the words and dimmed by the intensity of the moment,

there is in these verses a piece of Matthew theology

far more important than warnings about clericalism.

There is a powerful reminder about who is the center of all faith

and the source of all things: Christ Jesus.

As Matthew says, he is the only teacher, the only Rabbi, and father-like source of life.

Verse eight in the passage ought to get the attention of everyone:

"As for you...." he says.

Suddenly it's not about Scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees;

it is about us.

It is not about titles and clothing it is about humility,

the virtue found in the heart of every disciple of Christ Jesus.

"The greatest among you will be the one who serves the rest.

Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled,

but whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

Humility, not power is the only authority worthy of us.

Humility is the only virtue that most clearly identifies us with Christ Jesus

and gives us a share in the mystery of his power.
That identity is the issue here.
Our likeness to Christ Jesus is the measure of our authority, not our power.
That likeness comes from concern for the other,
service, compassion, and commitment.
That likeness comes from friendship with God,
from the honest recognition that we are all children of God,
made by God, called by God and redeemed by God.
There is no one here who is better or worse, good or bad;
this is the truth as humility sees it.
It springs out of the embracing love of God and the gift of Spirit
that let's us see as God sees, and love as God loves.

The true disciple imitates everything about the master.
Disciples of Christ Jesus do nothing to call attention to themselves,
but rather lose themselves in imitation of their master.
They never address this world or any other person
with the thought of what they can get for themselves,
but only with wonder about what they can give.
They have power that reduces every threat and fear to nothing.
It is the power that comes from a humble heart,
the power of kindness, the power of love, and the power of compassion.
It is the power that quiets every rage, and stills all anger.
The humble have that power, for they are close to God,
and they see as God sees.
They see through the postures of offense and anger,
through the costumes of pride and self-serving authority,
through the arrogance of sin and presumptions of privilege.
They know and they believe that the way of Jesus is the only way
to peace, to the unity of the human family, and to a life of joy and holiness.
This is what Jesus proposes there in the Temple that day,
and it is how he suggests we find our way into the Kingdom.
No Audio Available

24

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

11/10/2002

Wisdom 6:12-16 + 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 + Matthew 25:1-13

Fr. Boyer

In the next three weeks we proclaim the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. This chapter is the end of the public teaching of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, and it provides his final instruction about discipleship during this time before his return.

It becomes an extended meditation on discipleship, and the church leads us in that meditation with some clues from the Old Testament that help with these verses today.

Following that clue, the writer of our first reading today gives us the focus for reflecting on this Gospel.

We are easily distracted by details of the story, and it is easy to be troubled by those who will not share what they seem to possess. Great sermons have been preached about staying awake, but all of them fall asleep.

It is not the foolish ones who serve as model for disciples, but the others, called "Wise."

The oil they do not share may well be something they cannot share, and once we let go of the words literally, we are free to move into the Life this Word of God can give.

The Life of a disciple of Jesus is filled with Wisdom, and the author insists that those who seek it will find it.

Biblical "Wisdom" is an attribute of God, and attribute that "Godly" people may possess if they find it. In behavior it shows itself as Prudence, which is the behavior often used to describe these wise "virgins" of the Gospel story. The Prudent are those who seek the best way of doing things. They are those who look ahead, who look around, who live for more than the moment. The point with Prudence is the doing. This is a quality of action, an element of decision, a way of life that is responsible and accountable.

Those who lack Prudence are negligent, procrastinate, hesitant and inconsistent. They rationalize and blame and expect others to bale them out like those in the Gospel story whose lamps go out. They are left to live in the darkness. We will never learn from this story whether the foolish found any oil. What we do know is that when they returned, it was too late. Works of love and mercy cannot be shared. They are the results of Wisdom in a Prudent Life. The Prudent are people of action; wise, accountable, and reasonable.

They are disciples of Jesus Christ,
and they know what to do with their lives while they wait for his return.
No Audio Available

25
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
11/17/2002

No Audio Available

26

34th Sunday in Ordinary Time

11/24/2002

Ezekiel 34:11-12 + 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 + Matthew 25:31-46

Fr. Boyer

....and so ends the narrative portion of Matthew's Gospel on this last Sunday of our present Liturgical year.

With these final verses of Chapter 25 we conclude thirty four Sundays of Matthew's instruction, his companionship, and his vision of the Kingdom of God.

As Matthew tells his story, the Passion now begins.

In fact, the scholars tell us that with all the Gospels,

the Passion of Christ was written first,

and then the earlier parts of the Gospel were written to set the scene and introduce the characters.

That would suggest that we might imagine Matthew's Gospel to be a great drama allowing us this kind of overview.....

The Narrative of the Birth and Infancy of Jesus is a prelude before the curtain opens.

While we are getting settled in our seats, the lights go down, the orchestra plays some of the themes that will lead us through.

The genealogy, the annunciation to Joseph (which in Matthew gets more lines than Mary's annunciation because of his connection to David's lineage), a story of the visitors from the east, the reaction/introduction of Herod and his authorities.

This Christmas story is all an introduction, and we ought to remember that at this time of the year as the greed of cash-registers and profits twist this event way out of proportion.

Then, the curtain goes up. John the Baptist walks on, baptizes Jesus, and act one begins with a trip to the desert.

From then on a series of scenes unfolds one after another that some call "discourses" or "sermons" all leading to the final one given at the Temple in Jerusalem.

That is the scene we have just concluded, and it is now time in the Gospel for the finale - the final grand act that resolves the conflict which in Matthew's Gospel has been a conflict of Justice and Mercy, Law and Love.

Now we know what Advent is about, not Christmas, but the coming of the Son of Man. Our expectation and imagination of what this shall be like for us is shaken by this scene and the little drama within the big drama. The little drama is this story Jesus tells. It is a radical departure from the common idea of virtuous action bringing a reward.

The usual understanding is that one is rewarded for good works done on earth. The idea that "Justice" will come because someone is keeping track of all things in a great "book of life" is shattered by this story. As Matthew sees it, there is no record that the righteous can point to when called before the King. Both the blessed and the condemned are unaware of what really matters. What does matter, it seems, is the stuff they never thought of. What determines their destiny and seals their fate are things to which they never assigned any significance. All that stuff they were doing to look good and win favor didn't matter at all. In the end, it was something else entirely.

This whole idea flies in the face of what we think Justice is all about. We want it to be something

clear-cut. We want to be sure that we're right. We want to be certain that we are orthodox; that we have all the answers, and possess the truth, and of course, then we can call the shots.

That is why this scene is so surprising. Both sides are astonished that the Son of Man does not share their notion of "Justice" and their idea of balancing the books. In fact, the Son of Man does not make the final judgment. He confirms the depth of their actions. He ratifies their behavior. The King, not necessarily the same person, calls and dispatches one group and then the other.

Matthew suggests here that inconsequential acts of human generosity and compassion that people do without thought of reward or of profit have profound significance for the future as well as for the present. It is not what we got out of it now or ever that matters. In fact, the things from which we get nothing seem to have the most potential. Spontaneous acts of reaching out to another human being make the most difference in this kind of justice, not those where the consequences are measured and chosen for the maximum benefit. In the world's eyes, that kind of behavior is folly, but not so in this Gospel.

This is not a program of virtues that gains a reward. It suggests with some subtlety that the moment we decide what to do by what we get out of it, we've lost it. It suggests the spontaneous acts of human kindness which spring out of a heart tuned to the presence of Christ are the ones that matter. The message of this final scene is that whenever we give up our rights, our time, even our lives wasting ourselves for others, even for God, then we enter in the company of fools in the eyes of this world. Yet we know and discover perhaps only at the end that the leader of the fools is hidden among the unimportant ones of this world.

No Audio Available

27

Thanksgiving Day

11/28/2002

Sirach 30:22-24 + 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 + Luke 17:11-19

Fr. Boyer

There are some strange details in this text that should raise our curiosity and by doing so, should lead us to what is revealed by the Luke in this wonderful, familiar story. The Samaritan lived outside the requirements of Judaism. He did not and should not have gone to the priest, which was required by the laws of Judaism. The law required in Leviticus 14 required that anyone cleansed could return to normal life with the certification. What the others did was not out of the ordinary. By their obedience to the command of Jesus, they simply did what the law required. We have every reason to be curious about the reproach directed at them. They did only what they were told, and they did what was expected of them. In fact, their healing occurred in their going, that is, in their obedience. Finally, the statement about faith to the Samaritan is curious since they were all cured, and there was no comment about the faith of the others.

Now left with these curious facts, we can make some sense of this by realizing that there are two parts to this story. One is a typical healing story with the usual elements: a cry for help; Jesus responds, the healing occurs in the act of their obedience. The second part of the story concerns the faith of the foreigner who returns, praises God and gives thanks. When Jesus says: "Your faith has made you whole." something else is going on. The others were healed, but this man got something else. The word that Luke uses is the same word he uses in the Zacchias story when Jesus proclaims that he came to seek out and save what was lost. The word for SAVED is the same word used in this case to mean "Heal." What we have here is one story about nine being healed, and one being saved.

the deeper issue here is the difference between the Samaritan and the Jews, and Luke's Gospel explores that issue more and more deeply as the verses go by. Why were the Jews missing their chance, why were they turning away from the Messiah, what was happening that brought in the gentiles, the marginal, the outcasts into the glory of God before the one so highly favored? the story anticipates what is coming in Acts of the Apostles: a growing blindness in Israel and an openness among the Gentiles. The special place in God's plan for the world had turned in upon itself, their favor had turned into familiarity, duty had turned into privilege. In one sense, Luke suggests that Israel had lost the spirit of Gratitude.

We assemble here today not like the one who returns however, but more like the ones who do what is expected: keep the law, and be obedient. Here we gather to make Eucharist in ways we often simply take for granted on a day that suggests that Thanksgiving is not a holiday nearly as much as it is a way of life. What we might hear in this Gospel today is an invitation to look again at all the little things we simply have begun to take for granted; for in this is revealed the true spirit of gratitude.

It's easy to be thankful for the big stuff, the things that happen once in a lifetime. But it is God who stays with us day in and day out who has come to bring us salvation. It is a God who continues to be revealed in the daily routine of things, who cares for us in the ordinary ways that longs for our praise and thanksgiving. This was the problem for Israel, a problem made obvious by Luke's story, and its telling is not for the purpose of pointing out their error nearly as much as it is to get our attention that we might avoid the same mistake. Whatever we have taken for granted, whatever has ceased to amaze us as the free gift of God, whatever we have begun to expect because of some notion of our privilege or right has become a stumbling block, and today this Gospel urges us to notice the difference between the ones

who are healed and the ones who are saved that we might see and understand the difference.
No Audio Available

28

1st Sunday of Advent

12/1/2002

Isaiah 63:16-17,19; 64:2-7 + 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 + Mark 13:33-37

Fr. Boyer

We have a remarkable guide through most of this season of Advent.

Editors of the sacred texts call him "Isaiah",

but the book of the Bible using that name

covers more than a single lifetime.

"Isaiah" then is a collection of texts not a person.

This anonymous writer of chapter 63 will lead us for Advent's first three Sundays,

and then we shall turn to the work called Samuel to prepare ourselves

for the coming feast and celebration of God's Holy Incarnation.

Not knowing his name does not mean that we shall not come to know a lot about him. As we walk together through these weeks,

we shall come to know a great deal about him, and in him, we shall find ourselves.

He is no stranger to grief or trust.

He knows sin first hand and he knows grace.

He makes the somewhat startling suggestion that both are found in God,

and with that suggestion,

he leads us deeper into the mystery of our relationship with God.

With his lament about the human condition in sin,

he challenges the suggestion that God will have nothing to do with sinful people,

or that in sin, a sinner is far from God.

God is not being blamed for human sin, but in the context of this lament,

the mystery of divine providence and God's sovereignty over every area of human life is recognized and celebrated.

For this prophet, the sinful condition is like the exile in Babylon.

Although that exile was a consequence

of Israel's infidelity to the law and the covenant,

their trust in God never wavered, and even though they were broken and exiled

from all they found holy, they never doubted that God would come to them.

They continued to experience God's presence even in their sin.

We cannot help but hear the faith of Israel in this Psalm/like lament.

Rooted in the memory of what good things God has done in the past,

the prophet sings of trust in a future just as blessed and just has good.

We cannot help but share in that confident hope,

and be instructed, encouraged, and sustained by the promise proposed.

Nothing we have done changes God's love for us.

In fact, there is a way of looking at sin, as the prophet shows us,

that allows us to see in it, God's providence and presence right in the midst of it.

The God this prophet professes and proclaims is a God who parents, redeems, heals and shapes like a potter molds clay.

This God will never disappoint.

A society that touts the importance of independence and praises the ambition of the self-made-man or woman is going to have trouble with this prophet's image. Nonetheless, Isaiah's image of the potter and the clay is worth serious consideration. There is in us all an inclination to approach the potter with an idea of what we ought to be. We like our designs and specifications. Yet this season, led by Isaiah, invites us to yield to the potter, to wait upon God, to call upon God's name, and to remember all that God has done in the past. That is what Israel did while it waited in Babylon, in exile, in sin. Israel remembered.

"God is faithful." says Paul to the Corinthians. "He will come", insists Mark in the Gospel. What Mark offers is not a threat, but reassurance. No more than a parent would abandon a child, no more than any child could do anything to destroy the love of a parent, the relationship we have with God expressed and revealed by this prophet becomes our own song this season. The prophet has the courage to express his distress, his sin, and his expectation of God's anger because he knows, believes, and trusts that God's love can not be denied. To do so would be to put God out of existence.

There is no hiding from God.
There is no Babylon from which God is absent.
There is no Babylon from which God will not call us.
A prophetic people pick up the prophet's vision and share the prophet's hope.
God will come for us,
and we are about to celebrate the beginning of our return home.
No Audio Available

29

2nd Sunday of Advent

12/8/2002

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 + 2 Peter 3:8-14 + Mark 1: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

Our guide Isaiah takes us to Babylon today.

The glory of David's Kingdom and its mighty capital
with palace and temple are no more.

The once proud and mighty Israel

broken into two Kingdoms first by its own internal conflicts
over religious right and privilege

both are finally reduced to dim memories

as the able bodied are marched away from home as slaves of the victors.

There in Babylon, some scholars suggest, many were forced to work
on the building of a Persian road through the desert east of the Jordan.

This one whose words still have the power to inspire great music,
lift the discouraged, and restore broken dreams

speaks in this place today.

The one who speaks is not off in some distant place of security and comfort.

He has worked the long day shoulder to shoulder
with those whose struggle he shares.

They are building a road in the desert with their bare hands.

Rocks, sand, and boulders move when they push.

Hills flatten only when they dig.

The gift he shares with them is a way of seeing what they do
as a way of preparing for God.

The Babylonians were building a "Sacred Way"

for the procession of their god "Marduk".

Isaiah's suggestion is that Israel could find its present condition
to be a way of preparing for God rather than leading them away from God.

Some might consider the road to be for them; their way out.

Others could look at this road as God's route to them.

I suppose the first option assumes that they know where they are going.

Knowing the direction, they think they know which way to build.

The second option fits a bit more into truth of the matter.

These people are lost.

If they knew how to get out of the mess they were in,
they wouldn't be there.

A long time ago, in Boy Scout Survival wilderness training, I learned
that if lost, the best thing to do was to stay put and wait to be found.

If not, the one lost would be in greater danger from injury and exhaustion,
likely wandering in circles.

It seems like sound advise that has some scriptural parallels.

It seems to fit this season when we listen to the wisdom of our guide.

We are not going to get ourselves out of this life,
out of the slavery we find ourselves in because we have chased after other gods,
or out of the lonely isolation of our polarized church and society
by insisting we are right and others are wrong.
The words of Advent remind us firmly
that we are not preparing to welcome "the baby Jesus"
but rather the One who comes with Justice
and whose power is for the oppressed.
We may not use the Word of God to validate our way of life.
We run a terrible risk here
of hearing the Word of God as victors and achievers.
The Word has nothing to say to them.
Until we find in ourselves our sin, the things that enslave us,
our helplessness, our alienation from one another,
and how far we have come from Justice;
this season has no meaning, and the Word has no power.

The power of Isaiah's words came from his identity with his own.
The good news is not so much a message as it is a people
whose glorious redemption manifests the divine.
The glad tidings of this season are more than "Merry Christmas."
The glad tidings of this season is a people who find
hope, purpose, and a way to God in what they do.
The glad tidings of this season can only be heard
by those who know what it is to be lost
by those who have been waiting for the Lord,
and for those who long for Justice.
There is no good news for those who think they have earned
their place, their privilege and their rights.

The mission of a prophetic people in Advent
is to proclaim in word and deed that having been found by God,
we are going home.
It will best be done
by gathering together, going back for,
and looking around for any who have fallen or been left behind.
These are the days when anything that separates or scatters us,
when anything that lets us think we are different or better than another
must go.
Nothing short of total transformation in the landscape of our lives will do.

We build a road for Justice these days.
On that road, Kindness and Truth shall meet.
Justice and Peace shall kiss.
Truth shall spring from the earth,
while Justice will look down from heaven.
This road will be best built by tenderness and compassion
and faithfulness to the vision.

No Audio Available

30

3rd Sunday of Advent

12/15/2002

Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11 + 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24 + John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Fr. Boyer

Our last Sunday with Isaiah provides

a powerful and familiar text

known and used by Jesus in his own synagogue.

The condition of Israel when Isaiah writes these lyrical / poetical words provides no apparent reason for Joy.

They come back from Babylon with nothing but memories.

What was not torn down was left neglected.

What the Romans did not destroy, neglect, wind, sun, and rain ruined.

Cultivated fields were overgrown.

Flocks not taken away had run wild.

There were times when life looked better in slavery and some looked back with mixed emotions.

In the midst of that Isaiah rises up with his song.

He sings of Joy and stirs their hopes with memories that tell of God's presence.

The heart of this prophetic spirituality is Joy,

and his message to us rings out with the same challenge and hope as it did to those first re-builders.

His message of joy is timeless and still speaks to any who rebuild their lives.

After the death of a loved one,
or the death of a relationship following divorce;
it's time to rebuild.

After the loss of a job and all the dreams that the job may have sustained,
or some terrible mistake ruins hopes and shatters plans;
it's time to rebuild.

It is Joy that makes that possible.

Easily confused by a culture that would dope itself on possessions and pleasure,
Joy is not the same as happiness - that fleeting, momentary response to pleasure and delight.

Happiness comes from happenings that are positive and pleasant.

Happiness never lasts.

It vanishes in the face of trouble and trial.

This is not the gift of the prophet.

Joy awakens in the heart with the presence of God.

The Joyful are those who recognize and perceive that presence and "enjoy" the companionship it provides.

Those earliest re-builders faced the challenge and the disaster sustained by Joy as the prophet by his own presence

and through the power of his words and images
helped them remember all that God had done for them.
The believer who holds to the promise that God is present in all things,
tragedy and sin included,
remains joy and hope filled in the face of any disaster.

God never promised to make or keep us happy.
God simply promised to stay with us always.
This companionship, this presence is exactly what the Incarnation of God
is all about - immediate presence.
It is why the Birth of Christ, the beginning of God's presence among us,
is announced as it is time after time:
"I bring you tidings of Great Joy." says the angel to shepherds and to Zechariah.
It is why John the Baptist leapt for joy in the womb of Elizabeth.
It is why Mary is so exultant, it is why angels and Magi rejoice.
They have a spiritual gift bound up with the person of Jesus
who is the presence of God.

God has come to comfort his people,
and all are joined to God in a bond that is unbreakable:
unbreakable by sin, by tragedy, by disappointment, by violence, even by death!
Those who believe in what we will celebrate in ten days are the joyful,
and they have "tidings" to share.
While happiness may evaporate, Joy penetrates, permeates and persists
despite everything that can go wrong.
That is our song this day.
That is our prophetic message.
We wrap ourselves in the presence of God
who by, through, with, and in Jesus Christ is present among us,
now and forever.
No Audio Available

31

4th Sunday of Advent

12/22/2002

2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14-16 + Romans 16: 25-27 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr. Boyer

The prophet and the evangelist combine on Advent's last Sunday to lead us at last to Christmas.

Nathan, the prophet mediates a conversation between God and David through which we may consider the mysterious divine purpose that has been operative since David was taken as shepherd boy to be commander of God's people.

It will climax in keeping Israel safe from its enemies and in the establishment of a lasting house for the line of David.

All is now well for Israel.

The enemies have been defeated - Goliath has fallen.

The building of Jerusalem unites the divided kingdoms.

A splendid palace has been built,
and now David would build a splendid Temple.

A sophisticated urban life has settled over these people.

They are comfortable, secure, and very self-satisfied.

Everything is under their control,

and now the last wild, uncontrolled part of their life remains,
and they turn their attention to God wanting to establish God's dwelling place.

In effect, they want to domesticate God.

But God says, "NO" to that.

The covenant will not be placed in a particular space,
but rooted in a person:

David, and his posterity.

It is not the prerogative of humankind to contain the presence of God in any temple, ark, or tabernacle.

As the Gospel makes clear if the Prophet does not,
it is God's choice to be present through Incarnation in human flesh.

The struggle to domesticate God, to control God, to confine God,
and even to exclude God continues to this day.

But God is no more interested in tabernacles and temples now than then,
no more likely to abandon human life which is God-made
for a dwelling man-made now than then.

But the struggle goes on.

We build our churches, tabernacles, and temples, like this one,
and run the risk of thinking we've got God cornered.

This is a place is for us to assemble renewing God's vision and plan for creation,
to proclaim a presence of God that has no limits,
to affirm that all human life is the divine dwelling place,
now, not later.

We catch here the wild spirit of God that will not be contained
cannot be denied, and will never be excluded.
But the struggle goes on.

We would put God in a temple and deny the presence of God
in an unwanted, or unplanned pregnancy
in order to preserve our comfortable secure life-style or our career plans.
We would take control over life and death and terminate that life.
We would put God in a temple and deny the presence of God
in those who through our very imperfect "justice system"
now sit on death row awaiting termination of life.
We would put God in a temple while planning for war,
hardening our hearts to the death of women and children as collateral damage
not remembering that human life is the chosen dwelling place of God.
We would put God in a temple while we reduce human life to misery and hunger,
and deny health care to the poor and unemployed.

But yet we build this temple so that we might think about these things,
and hear the prophet and the Gospel inviting us to think again about where God lives.
The temple in which we sit today is a place of conversion and revelation,
not a place to contain God at the cost of God's chosen dwelling place.
It is good then to be here.
It is good to hear these difficult and challenging words of Prophet and Evangelist
hours before Christmas
so that our celebration of this feast may not be preempted
by commercials, consumers, and the economy,
nor lost in convenient sentimentality.

God's presence in the world is what this feast is all about:
no longer the presence of a baby lying in a manger,
but rather a presence in what that baby symbolizes:
every homeless, unwelcomed, and foreign human being.
This presence gives human history its fundamental orientation.
This is a presence that reorients us toward God.
It is the Presence we celebrate.
It is the Presence that gives cause for Joy.
It is the Presence that takes away our fear.
It is the Presence that grounds our morality in respect of our selves
as temples of the living God,
and respect for every human life.

The message of Luke's angel, Gabriel is spoken in this church today.
The Holy Spirit has come upon us.
Out of our barrenness, our weakness, our sinfulness, and the chaos of this world,
God creates again.
The model disciple rises up from the readings of this day, Mary.
In contrast to David, she knew where God lives,
and she summons us as well to ponder in our hearts

the meaning and purpose of this presence and this mystery,
and to acknowledge and affirm the dwelling place of God.
No Audio Available

32

Christmas

12/25/2002

Fr. Boyer

Most of what goes on in this Gospel story happens at night.

So, there is good reason for us to gather here in the night, while it is dark.

As the Gospel unfolds the story, night is best time to find Christ the Lord.

The darkness is where he is to be found.

The darkness is the best time to see.

It would seem that our God prefers the night.

While thinking of this and praying about it this week,

I recalled what we are told happened when Christ died.....

how the day became as night,

how the sun was darkened at the third hour.

It would seem that our God is comfortable in the shadows

and prefers the night.

But you and I....

We like the light and prefer the day.

We like the light so we can see in the mirror.

We like the lights on so we can be seen.

We like the lights on so we can shop,

so we can drive,

so we can know what's going on

and see what lies ahead.

We just feel safer in the day or at least with the lights on.

But God still prefers the night.

Somehow in God's plan,

it takes short days and long nights for seeds to sprout.

Lovers seem to prefer the night with its moon and stars.

It's in the night that we hold hands and reach for another.

Less confident of ourselves,

in the night we welcome a companion, a love, a presence.

And so it is with our God who comes in the night.

The darker the night, the more joyful the dawn.

It doesn't seem too odd that the first to hear the news,

the first to make their way

are the ones awake in the night,

the ones at watch while others sleep,

the ones outside while the others take comfort and safety inside.

It's almost as though you have to be outside, in the dark, to hear this news.

Even the ones from the East have to stay up - wait for the night - to see a star.

The night and its darkness in which we find this God-made-man,
this God, Immanuel, is of course not exactly the night of time.
It is the night of our darkness in sin,
the night of our darkness in fear,
the night of our darkness in loneliness,
the night of our darkness in loss and helplessness.

As those who survive addictions know,
it is not until you hit bottom and have nothing left
that you have a future and any hope.
Until we get out of the light, we will never find our way to Bethlehem.
Until we put out the lights of all the "would be" god's of pleasure and success,
pride and power, we will never find the way to Bethlehem.
We have to get into the darkness.
We have to remember that we don't know the way.
We have to reach out for another - grasp a hand in the darkness.
We have to trust that it is better not to go alone.
The shadows of our lives with the good and the bad,
the stuff we would rather hide from the glare of day and the gaze of others,
and the past with its sin
looks all the same in the dark,
and that's where God waits for us.

The prophet insists
that only a people who have walked in the darkness
can ever really see.
This Bethlehem scene told in the night
becomes a story of lovers who meet in the darkness
where the eye only sees what one loves
and what one hopes for in the deepest part of the heart.
Blemishes, imperfections, scars of the past;
make no difference in the dark.

Like parents waiting and watching for the return of a child
who is late in the night,
our God waits and watches for us to come home in the night.
And so we assemble here in the night
just as we shall do in the spring before Easter.
It is the best time for those who live by hope for the dawn of life itself.
Hope stirs here.
The word is out that the Bridegroom has come, as always, in the night.
Be watchful, my friends.
Take courage.
The darkest of days and night will not swallow us up.
There is someone in the darkness, in the shadows.
That is the news we share and the truth that gives us Joy.
The dawn is coming, the promise of glory is announced.
Only one light is needed and it comes from the Creator of all light.

Go to Bethlehem -
there is no power there,
there is no wealth,
there is no success nor fame.
Your companions will be suspicious night folk - shepherds.
Go while it is dark or when you feel it is night.
This Gospel suggests that if we do,
we shall see as if it were the day and call it "Glory."
No Audio Available

Genesis 15:1-6; 1:1-3 + Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19 + Luke 2:22-40

Fr. Boyer

One look at the families in the Bible,

and you discover there's hope for us all.

Dysfunction is not a social phenomenon of the late twentieth century.

That age just gave it a clever name that markets a lot of self-help books.

We would like to think that all was well with Abraham and Sarah.

After all, they were favored by God, open to God's plans,

and more or less happy to co-operate.

Abraham tried to kill his son, Isaac!

God had to intervene.

Then Isaac had his own problems with his two sons

who fought among themselves and tricked each other out of their inheritance.

But who could be surprised, their ancestors, Adam and Eve

ended up with Cane and Able. They didn't do so well either!

The families of Biblical History are not much different from the families of our time. Infidelity, abuse,

lying, cheating, rebellious children,

murder, lonely widows, abandonment, illness, and early death.

It's all there. It's all in our history. It's all a part of being God's people.

This annual feast on the Sunday after Christmas

can become stressful observance for many

especially those who grew up with

the Nelson family and the Cleavers as weekly models

in their homes as television entertainment.

I don't know about you,

but my dad never wore a tie in the house.

He wore it to work, but came off just before his shoes

when he walked through the door.

I never saw Ozzie Nelson lying on the couch drinking a beer!

While my parents kept their disputes to themselves

and I never saw how they worked out their disagreements,

I was keenly aware of the silence and stares that were a part of that process.

The consequence of all that idealism

leaves us stranded in these days of single parent families,

blended families, extended families, and families of persons

not genetically related to one another.

For some it may stir up guilt, disappointment, or anger.

This feast has nothing to do with that.

It invites us to think again about family in a more radical way:

to reconsider the relationships of our lives.

Famulus in Latin means servant,

which would suggest that the real meaning of "family"

is that place where one serves another, where places the needs,

interests, desires and delights of the other ahead of their own.

Family is the nesting ground of society
where each of us learn to live with and love one another
discovering who we are and what we are capable of becoming.
It is that net-work of relationships that keeps our ego in check,
and teaches us to look out for one another.

It strikes me that one of the unexpected benefits
to rethinking the idea of "family"
brought about by the broken relationships of our generations
is that we might think bigger than the unit that shares the same address.
The whole vision of the "Human Family" is a healthy one.
It might inspire diplomats and politicians to think more creatively
about how to bring peace to this world,
and it might motivate all of us to look out for one another
more personally when some of the family are out of work, homeless,
sick or hungry.

This feast is no sentimental opportunity to compare ourselves
to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. It comes as a reminder that there is family larger than those who share the
same name or the same genes.
Family is not a matter of marital fidelity.
It is a relationship of care and service.
It is a bond of grace and love.
This day speaks to us of God's family,
and invites us to consider our ancestors in faith.
That is the role of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in this feast.
We are related to them: to Abraham and Sarah too;
to David, Samuel, Esther, Ruth, and Jeremiah;
to Simeon and Anna; Peter, Andrew, James, and John.
They are our brothers.
Joan of Arc, Teresa of Avila, and Teresa of Calcutta;
Oscar Romero and Dorothy Day are part of our family.
They teach us to serve, how to be proud of ourselves,
and they teach us the responsibility of love and service
as a consequence of being born into the human family-----
the Holy Family that has God as Father and Mother of us all.
No Audio Available

34

Mary, Mother of God

1/1/2003

Fr. Boyer

On the last and the first day of this year,
Mary stands at the center of our assembly.

This time, not because of what she said,
but because of what she did.

Luke gives us no words from her lips.

She says nothing.

He simply says that she pondered all these things in her heart.

Here is what faith asks of us:

that we stand in awe before the mystery of what has happened.

Faith does not ask us to be great orators, apologists, defenders of doctrine,
or know and articulate with perfection the great tradition

that we inherit from generations before us.

Faith simply asks that we ponder these things,

reflect on them, wonder about them,

and live day in and day out in the presence of God

whose peace takes flesh and takes root in our lives.

The media so easily turns Faith into a words and sound bites
that are clever and memorable.

Slick evangelists of every denomination talk and talk and talk by the hours.

As a consequence, we run the risk of talking religion,

of thinking that faith is a matter of formulas and words, ideas, and concepts.

But the finest evangelist in my life was a grandmother, and in her footsteps, my parents.

They didn't talk about faith very much, they just lived in the presence of God.

They didn't know profound theological concepts, but they knew about life and death, love and sacrifice,
and understood that God was with them through it all.

What better way to end one year and begin another

than by renewing our faith in the presence of God

reminding ourselves that we do not need to understand everything,

do not need to be in control of everything,

do not need to be able to explain everything that happens,

but simply live gracefully and simply in the presence of God

reflecting upon that presence and living with the mystery

all our days.

No Audio Available

35

Epiphany of the Lord

1/6/2003

Isaiah 60:1-6 + Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6 + Matthew 2:1-12

Fr. Boyer

The question put before us by Matthew today
is whether our relationship to Jesus
is still a quest that springs from the deepest longings of our hearts.

The quest to find Jesus makes restless every human heart,
and who knows how or where people find Jesus?
Some spend their whole lives looking without success,
perhaps because they are blinded by their expectations.

This rich and ancient story we tell on the Twelfth Day of Christmas
speaks of our quest and our expectations.
It speaks of our quest because so much is revealed about us by our longings and the things we seek.
It speaks of our expectations because where we look and what we look for affects what we find.

One star in a black night sky captured their attention
because they were looking.
Something different for them was a cause of wonder
that led them to Christ.
Not put off because the one they sought was not found
in the great city of Jerusalem or its palaces,
they found Him in insignificant Bethlehem
in an ordinary house with his very ordinary mother.

This is a profound tale with a treasure of wisdom.
Not everyone who looked at the sky that night
saw what those astrologers from the East saw.
Something more is required to recognize what is different
and be willing to wonder and follow it.
Too many of us look for what is the same;
for what is not different,
for what is predictable and expected.
When something out of the ordinary occurs
or someone out of the ordinary moves through our lives,
we shy away, are threatened, and avoid the challenge to our controlled and predictable existence.
Those who avoid what is unexpected or different
may very well never find Christ Jesus.
Blinded by expectations, the people of this story
may well have missed the presence of Christ.
Their willingness to go to Bethlehem,
their wisdom to listen to the Scriptures,
and their openness to any possibility
brought them to Christ.

I suspect that when they returned home,
their friends and family were a little amazed and a little amused.
"What did you see?" they were probably asked.
When their report was so simple, ordinary and humble,
they must have been thought of as fools.
But this is the beginning of the Good News some still consider foolish.
The "gift" of this story may not be Gold, Frankincense, or Myrrh.
The "gift" they possess may be the wisdom to be unthreatened
by what is different and unexpected
with the willingness to look deeper into darkness.
The "gift" they possess may be the ability to get beyond expectations
and be surprised to discover the presence of God
in people and places that seem to have nothing to offer.

When that happens, the ones who seem to have the most to offer,
the ones bearing gifts end up being the ones
who receive the real Gift of God.
Our quest for Christ Jesus
will reveal our expectations and challenge their limits.
It will reveal the deepest longings of our hearts.
If we long for palaces and their riches,
for that security and the confidence that we know the way,
we shall not have learned much from
these companions of ours whose story we tell today.

On the Twelfth Day of Christmas
our wise companions lead us into the mystery
of the Incarnation;
into the mystery of a God who will be revealed
in the simple and the ordinary,
the different and the unexpected.
We may seem a bit foolish to believe this,
but only in the eyes of those
who can never wonder in the dark.
No Audio Available

36

Baptism of the Lord

1/12/2003

Isaiah 42: 1-4,6-7 n+ Acts 10:34-38 + Mark 1:7-11

Fr. Boyer

It is only the seventh verse of Mark's Gospel

The whole of this Gospel to this point has been occupied by John the Baptist. Only his voice has been heard.

Up to this point, Matthew and Luke have been busy with Shepherds, Astrologers from the East, Old folks in the Temple, visions, dreams, and angels.

None of that for Mark.

The identity of Jesus the Christ will come from the Prophets and the Scriptures themselves.

What angels announce in Matthew and Luke is spoken by a voice from torn open heavens.

Loaded with images of Old Testament hopes, these five verses tell the end of the story at its beginning.

What a Roman centurion will proclaim on a hill outside Jerusalem at the end of this Gospel, a voice from the heavens proclaims in the Jordan.

What happens to the veil in the Temple at the end occurs in the heavens at the beginning.

Torn in two, the secret and everything that was hidden is made known.

What only you and I and Jesus know in the first chapter is known to all by the last.

It's as though the story is being told in reverse.

We know the ending at the beginning.

What Mark gives us here in the first chapter of the first Gospel is the faith of the community from which he writes.

This voice that speaks so clearly is the voice of their faith and what they have come to believe.

The identity established here in this first chapter is more than the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is their identity that is about to be made known.

It is more than the troubling relationship between Jesus and John that is explored here.

It is the relationship of the new Israel (the dove) to God that is being revealed and unfolded.

What we discover here is the end of the story.

Knowing what Jesus has been given; we know now what he has to give.

This Jesus, having been given the Spirit

will give that Spirit to others.

This Jesus who has made himself one
with those who seek repentance by choosing to be Baptized
has a unique relationship with God that he will share
with those who will come to the water.

Through this story, Mark not only reveals the identity of Jesus,
but he invites those who share his faith in this Son of God
to orient their lives toward this Spirit-filled Jesus.

He is the one who can guide and lead us into God's new and decisive
way of Salvation.

There is no other way to get there.

Just as he died for us, he is baptized for us.

He had no need of Baptism,
but his willingness to go down into the water
just like his willingness to go down to death
brought him God's affirmation and the Spirit.
That spirit will next drive him into the desert
where he will know temptation and emerge the victor.

That's the end of the story, Victory for those who are filled with the Spirit.

It can be the end of our story as well,
but to get there we will have to go down into the water,
into the desert,
and into the mystery of this one who is servant and son.

When we confess who he is, we know what we can become.

"Son of God" is a significant title for Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

It not only signifies the identity of Jesus and what he shall become
as he is led by this spirit;

but it reveals what we shall become by that same spirit
poured out upon those who see themselves as one with him.

And so, today it is not angels, prophets, old folks in the temple,
shepherds, astrologers, or dreams that reveal Jesus Christ,
but you and me.

The voice to be heard today is ours.

The lives to be filled with the spirit are ours.

The victory over temptation, evil, and death is ours,
and for this we have every reason to give thanks, and praise, and glory.

No Audio Available

37

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

1/26/2003

Jonah 3:1-5 + 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 + Mark 1:14-20

Fr. Boyer

Zebedee sits there and watches them leave;
a father who has provided them with everything;
a loving home;
an education that will feed them and their children some day;
boats, nets, and even hired hands to help.
Along comes this carpenter's son,
and they're gone.
Years of patient teaching,
and after five minutes' talk with that man from Nazareth,
they're off chasing a dream.

Zebedee stays at the boat.
Is it because he was not called?
Is it because he was too old?
Maybe he could have gone.
Maybe he should have gone.
Maybe he should have stopped them.
Now he has to tell their mother.
But maybe he knew all along that there were other things to do than fish.
Perhaps the world was getting bigger.
The Romans and their ways were changing everything.
And so they left him mending the nets.

It's not just a Gospel story. It's ours as well.
If it isn't boats and nets they leave,
it's the church or school.
Those left behind, like Zebedee are left to ponder the truth that
God's ways are not our ways.
And so we pick up this Gospel today to ponder the mystery of "Call";
to reflect upon the wonder of our discipleship;
and look at the truth.

I have begun to believe that this is the mystery of who God calls..... not Zabadee. He was already successful by the standards of his day: a boat or two, hired hands, at least two sons, and who knows what else? I suspect that he wasn't called because all of that would have gotten in the way. He would have been telling Jesus what to do, how to do it, where to go, and who to talk to. Instead, God calls those who have nothing to lose, and even less to give. As it turns out, they are lot like that figure from the Old Testament who stands before us today, an unlikely candidate for greatness and God's work. He is full of opinions, self-willed, talks too much, and is very full of himself. God seems to have a distinct preference for the unlikely. Perhaps they are more open to God's plans than their own.

I have begun to believe that the wonder here is that discipleship is not first a call to do something, but

rather an invitation into a relationship, a companionship that is wider and more powerful than family and much more productive than a job.

I have begun to believe that the truth we may discover here is that God calls us to be something before we ever do something. Discipleship with Jesus is a relationship that once accepted changes what we do and why we do it. Whether it is Jonah, the sons of Zebadee, or you and me; it's about relationship first, and then about mission. What the disciples of the Gospel learn, and what Jonah learned the hard way is that the mission is God's. Excuses, claims of inadequacy, fear, or any doubts about the mission at all are misplaced because they spring out of the suspicion that we are the ones who will make it work. What we discover in the whole of this Gospel is that messengers, the disciples, are in themselves weak and inadequate. But that's not the point. The success of the mission has nothing to do with the virtue, the strength, or the lack thereof on the part of the disciple. The success lies in the One whose word sends them forth.

To follow Jesus does not mean to "walk behind" in the world from which this Gospel springs. In that world, it meant to "follow" another in an intellectual, moral and religious manner. That kind of following grew out of a relationship between the leader and the follower. I like to imagine that there were other days in Galilee when the boys came home, and that old Zebadee and his wife welcomed them and listened with great joy to the stories they told and the wonders they saw. I also like to imagine that from time to time when they came home and sat down at the kitchen table, they brought with them Jesus whose presence blessed that home their work and their love. That day in Galilee, Jesus was inviting the sons of Zebadee to enter into such a relationship with him. When we proclaim this Gospel in this room today, he does the same.

No Audio Available

Malachi 3:1-4 + Hebrews 2:14-18 + Luke 2:2-40

Fr. Boyer

It is now forty days since Christmas.

Forty days ago we assembled in here in the darkness of night,
clinging to a hope inspired by faith that light would come.

Today we celebrate again that light;

the light by which we see and the light by which we are seen.

There is a decided turn in mood and message today.

The cheerful and joyful mood of Christmas

is set aside now for the message of truth about what is to come.

Now we know why this child was born

and where his life will lead.

And so, in a few weeks, we shall mark the passage of another forty days.

We shall assemble here in the darkness of night,

clinging to a hope inspired by faith that light will come.

And it will. We shall carry that light into this holy place,

and like Simeon and Anna,

we shall proclaim that our salvation has come in Christ the Risen Lord.

Deep in the mystery of this ancient ritual behavior

stands the figure of Mary, and by her side, the silent figure of Joseph:

parents who lives stand as a pattern for all.

They stand there in the temple confronted by the truth

which offers them no escape from the suffering to come.

The truth is difficult and often unwelcome.

We live in a culture of lies forced upon us by our economy

with its advertising and entertainment,

by its false promises promoted by celebrities

whose lives are hollow and empty.

Vast empires of wealth are built on drugs and alcohol

to provide brief and shallow pleasures.

Suffering is to be avoided at all costs.

The lie says: "If it doesn't feel good, don't do it."

In the face of that lie comes the truth proclaimed by Simeon and Anna.

These are not two old fools who have been hanging around the Temple
because they're too old to work.

These are the words and the wisdom of two who know the truth,

the truth of what God has promised,

and the truth of what a life fully lived outside the lie is really all about.

It's about swords and sadness.

It's about grief, doubt, fear, and sorrow.

A faith that does not embrace all of life is no faith at all.

A generation that wishes for a religion without tears

will never root itself in the life of Jesus Christ.
Those two in the Temple tell the truth and expose the lie
to the two who stand before them, Mary and Joseph;
who stand there as a pattern of us all.

They are parents, and their parenting is real.
They speak to everyone who has taken up that vocation.
They had three things in their favor.
They had the support of their religion.
They knew that they were raising this child for God.
They never thought for a minute that their child was a product of themselves, or a result of their
planning.
Their son was not a fulfillment of their lost or incomplete youth.
They had the support of their culture.
Jesus never had to worry about whether his parents would have time for him. He did not have to
compete with jobs and a host of other projects.
He did not live with the terrible burden of fear that one of them might not be there when he woke up.
They had the support of their economy.
They may have been poor, but they worked, prayed, and played together.
Meals were not missed because of games,
and prayers were not skipped for any reason.
It was a different world, but one thing is not different from our world,
and we learn it from this Temple scene:
parents take God's place in raising children whom God calls by name.

This Gospel is about identity:
the identity of a child - perhaps the identity of every child.
This Gospel is about the truth:
and who shall become if we are willing to serve, and do not run from suffering.
This Gospel is about faith;
the faith to wait, to watch and to pray for the Light to come and the darkness to scatter.
This Gospel is about parents; parents who have courage and faith:
parents who come to the Temple and out of love bear the sorrow and the trials of parenting because
they know that through sacrifice and suffering, life and wholeness will be given to all who believe.
And that is what it means to grow strong, be filled with Wisdom and enjoy the favor of God.
No Audio Available

39

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/9/2003

Job 7:1-4,6-7 + 1 Corinthians 9:16-19,22-23 + Mark 1:29-39

Fr. Boyer

We have someone with us today who is rarely here.

He is a little restless and often on the move.

I've known him most of my life.

He is not always popular, and I think it's because he complains too much.

I suspect he sings off key, whines a whole lot, and hasn't many friends.

His name is Job.

He shows up rarely in our liturgical readings,

and I think it is probably due to his steady stream of complaining and laments that are not very appealing in the context of celebrations.

But he and his story are important to us.

Without him and the themes he raises,

we would be out of balance and probably deep in denial.

Job brings us a dose of reality.

Today he proposes four things that to the honest are undeniable:

things are not always right and lovely

they need not be this way and can be changed

sometimes my situation is intolerable

with God things can be better, and I really believe this to be true.

The book of the bible that bears his name explores human suffering.

Job himself may or may not have actually historically existed.

But his story does, and all share his experience.

Rich in the eyes of this world, he has everything anyone could want:

family, friends, wealth, and property.

He lost everything that he had looked upon as God's blessings.

He came down with a disease that tortured him day and night.

Those around him scoffed at his fidelity to God in the face of all that.

They suggested that his sin or someone else's caused it all.

In the back and forth discussions recorded in the book,

the popularly held notion that suffering was a punishment for sin

gets contradicted, and God's role in misfortune is not clear.

At least, God is not to blame.

We are left to think that perhaps wealth, friends, possessions, and power are not really "gifts" that God give or takes.

Perhaps, suffering is not really from God either.

What we are left to discover is that Faith is the gift,

and that with the gift of faith,

we can become creative with everything else.

Suffering is a part of the human condition.

The experience of it can either lead us nearer to God
or send us running from God in despair and disappointment.
It is the same with wealth, friends, and possessions.
They can either lead us nearer to God,
or drive us deep into selfish hoarding and loneliness.
The Good News we proclaim is not an escape from the pain of life
as I suggested last week in the context of parenting.
The Good News offers a way to transform suffering
into the birth pangs of something new.
In the end, the Gospel is not given to us to make us good,
but to make us creative.

This is the kind of discipleship Jesus promotes
among those who follow him.
The Jesus of this Gospel is a creative gift.
His work of healing and forgiveness is a work of creation
and by his own words, this is why he has come.
Suffering people in the Gospel come to Jesus.
They are healed and set free.
The most burdened life is the one most filled with potential
and holds the promise of new creation.
The disciple who joins in the work of Jesus,
joins in that work,
and when it happens lament is turned into praise,
complaint becomes thanksgiving,
and God becomes companion.
When that happens within us,
we will have become disciples,
and will have Good News to proclaim.
No Audio Available

40

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/16/2003

Leviticus 13:1,2,44-46 + 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 + Mark 1:40-45

Fr. Boyer

The ancient world lived a much more integrated life than we have.

The dichotomy between the natural and spiritual was not so clearly drawn.

God was not shoved off to heaven. Demons were not shoved into hell.

Illness was not nearly as clinical as it is now.

The ancient culture in which we find Jesus experienced the body and the soul as more interdependent than we would like.

Our "post modern" even "post-Christian" culture is more comfortable with a fragmented view of self.

I say, "post-Christian" because I believe that this very separated, broken existence where the human and the divine are pulled apart, where the body and soul are distinct, where the sacred and the secular are clearly different is the very antithesis, the very undoing, or opposite of what the Incarnation is all about.

There is a way of seeing the work of Jesus as a work of integration,

a work of confirming the wholeness of life and the unity of that life in the source of life, God.

The Gospel Mark puts before us today is just such a ministry.

It is a ministry of restoration, a ministry of healing.

He sends the man to the priest.

The deliberate connection of healing, cleansing, and faith are not incidental to this event.

The details in this story have sacramental implications.

The healing and cleansing of this man is a spiritual event just as much as it is a physical one.

In fact, we are left to wonder if it could have been possible had one of these elements been absent.

What good would it have been to be free of this disease, if the man's relationship to the community had not been restored by the priest he was sent to see.

None of the miracles, none of the healing ministry of Jesus happened without faith and talk of salvation.

The body and the soul for Jesus are always one.

It strikes me as somehow very revealing

when I hear people praying for the sick or praying for their own deliverance from illness who given so little thought toward their soul's illness in sin.

We are becoming a people without soul, and therefore without sin.

Moving deep into this Gospel reveals that the issue here

is more than a physical malady.

The "condition" is human sin in all its forms and all its consequences.

Just as much as leprosy

can destroy, separate, isolate, and cripple, so does sin.

They saw that clearly in the ancient cultures.

Yet, we don't quite get it.

In our fragmented existence, keeping the soul and the body apart, we live in denial: denial of our dis-ease with sin, and our ill health as well.

Yet we spend billions a year on health-care, and we see doctor after doctor, get our shots (even at church), and see Pharmacies being built faster than banks. We want the body strong and healthy, and we want to live long and happy lives while the soul's condition is ignored, forgotten, or just left till "later" when we have time or else have nothing better to do.

Given the lengths to which many will go to be cured of a disease such as cancer through surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, it occurs to me that we might be just as challenged to make comparable efforts to be healed and forgiven of sin.

The details of this gospel give us the critical outline of a miracle story:

(1) the petitioner approaches Jesus requesting healing;

(2) Jesus responds with a touch and a word;

(3) the cure is affirmed.

This is the consistent framework of healing miracles,

and the consistent ritual of "Reconciliation", a Sacrament.

We fail to see and recognize this because of our fragmented lives.

We fail to see sin as a malady that is destroying our lives just as much as any other illness - because we have lost our sense of wholeness affirmed by the Incarnation. This rift in our selves allows deep denial over the illness of sin.

We have reduced sin to issues of sexual desires and behavior,

and pretended that violence, greed, fear that holds us back from doing good, and the seductions of power and wealth are not really sins.

They're just not "nice."

Lent is coming, my friends: the time for cleansing and healing.

On the very first Monday of Lent we will gather here to begin those days of healing. Every Wednesday of Lent in the evening, and every Friday of Lent at noon there will be an opportunity for you to imitate the faith of the man in this Gospel. Just as he dared to approach Jesus and declare, "If you will, to do so, you can cure me", so should every one of us be so bold and so full of faith.

No Audio Available

41

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/23/2003

Isaiah 43:18-22 + 2 Corinthians 1:18-22 + Mark 2:1-12

Fr. Boyer

When the crowd clears and the dust settles,
there is nothing left here but a hole in the roof
Angry scribes have slipped off soon to confront this man from Nazareth
for his blasphemies.

Jesus has also slipped away from the mob and goes looking for disciples.
The owner of the house is probably having second thoughts
about his guest while he looks for roof repair.

The crowd has gone back to whatever it is they do all day,
but not quite the same.

And somewhere in Capernaum there's a party going on.
Five friends are celebrating an event that has changed their lives
fulfilled their fondest dreams, and confirmed the bond of their friendship.

Not simply a piece of Mark's development of the connection between
healing and forgiveness, or his unfolding of the identity of Jesus,
this is also the very human story of the power of faith and friendship.

The paralyzed man has lost his health, but not his friends.

We are left to imagine what went on between the five of them:
whose idea it was,
and whose faith in Christ Jesus led them onto the roof,
but we are not left to imagine the consequences.

These twelve verses tell us as much about the power of friendship
as they do about the power of Jesus.

They speak about forgiveness;
the finest gift friends can share.

Jesus enters into that friendship with them,
and by his presence the very love of God is made visible
through the love of these friends.

Jesus does not so much DO something here,
as CONFIRM something that is already at work.

The relationship between reconciliation and friendship
has been opened as clearly as the hole in the roof.

A little while later, Jesus will address those
who gather around a table with him, and he will call us "friends".

This Gospel calls us to celebrate again our friendships,
reminds us that they are moments of grace and power
for new levels of relationship to God,
and they are in fact, sacramental;
bringing us what we truly need.

The network of all our human relationships
springs to life from the friendship of a husband and wife.
The event Mark puts before us
confirms what we have discovered again and again in our own lives:
The beauty of friendship is in its power to forgive, to reconcile,
and provide a sense of security and well-being.
It is an experience that brings us to praise God,
to look again at how we view our church, sin, and grace;
and where we find the power for reconciliation and renewal
that leaves us with praise in our hearts and on our tongues.

A hole in the roof.....

A mat abandoned somewhere on the way to a celebration.....

little reminders of what has happened to us
and what we shall become through friendship in faith
and in Christ Jesus.

What we proclaim this winter day is the power of human love
and human relationship that Jesus Christ has come to reveal and affirm.

No Audio Available

42

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

3/2/2003

Hosea 2:17-22 + 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 + Mark 2: 18-22

Fr. Boyer

Pharisees get a bad rap in the Gospels.

Consequently, we are not inclined to listen to what they have to say much less why they say it.

Gospel writers use them as a tool to reinforce the sayings of Jesus, and that works well,

but sometimes what Jesus has to say

does not overturn or reverse what the Pharisees say,

but simply reinforces it from another direction.

I think today's encounter with the Pharisees could be heard in that way with a little more attention to the motives of these Pharisees.

Far from being self-righteous moralists

saving their souls by scrupulous personal behavior,

Pharisees are trying to create a common culture

that would support fellow Jews in living their religion

in the hostile environment of pagan Roman culture.

They understood that the identity and the survival

of any minority is the firm cohesion of members

and preserving their clear distinction from others.

Their whole focus was to confirm, establish, and maintain the identity of Israel. They believed that doing so rested upon the faithful and strict

observance of Jewish law especially the laws that distinguished them from the Romans.

They believed that the Jewish people were God's people

that they lived in Covenant with God

and were therefore different from if not better than

the Romans, and to keep their privileged status,

they had to keep all the rules of the covenant.

Pharisees believed that one's identity as a member of God's chosen people

was best found in obedience to God's law.

Nothing wrong with that thinking !

We are about to enter into the season of Lent.

Forty days of identity search.

It begins with an outward sign that you can wash off,

and probably will within hours of its being imposed:

a cross of ashes on your forehead.

Everyone who sees that cross will know your identity

and know where you've already been that day.

But once it is cleaned away, who will know and what will they know?

That is the question posed by this Gospel,

an appropriate question to raise three days before Lent begins.

In years past, people knew our identity by what we ate on Friday by how we began a meal in public with the sign of the cross, as much as by where we went to church.

These days, it is probably worth asking the question:

How would anyone know we were disciples of Jesus rather than disciples of Alan Greenspan?

How would they know that we live by Gospel values rather than peer pressure?

How would they know that we believe that we have been made by God from the dust of the earth and will return to that dust one day?

The Forty Days that begin this Wednesday give us time to consider those questions and others like them that concern our identity as children of God and disciples of Christ Jesus.

Sacrifice, fasting, and prayer are the time-honored ways of sorting out and confirming our identity.

Until we know who we are, no one else will either.

Those ancient and well-proven ways provide for us our identity and give us the courage to make more public witness to the truth of that identity by the choices we make, the causes we claim, and the style of our life in relationship to this world and its inhabitants.

The Challenge of the Pharisees speaks to us today, about how we are to preserve our identity in a world that is hostile or indifferent to the values of our faith and the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

What we shall do, and how we shall observe these forty days are matters that shape that identity and remind us who we are.

These sacraments, customs, prayers, fasting, and almsgiving are for us what the Law was for the Pharisees.

The observance of these customs are what keep us together and faithful to the one who has lived among us and remains among us in the sacramental life of the church.

A little patch here, a little fix now and then is not going to keep us faithful to the Gospel we have been given and the life we are promised.

What is required says Jesus, is that we abandon whole ways of thinking, adopt new ways of living, and embrace a life that will never leave in doubt who we are and where we are going.

No Audio Available

43

Ash Wednesday

3/5/2003

Joel 2:12-18 + 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 + Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

Fr. Boyer

The first words of this great and holy season come from God himself.

It is Joel who gives voice to the longing of God,
who calls us together
and asks us to look up from the cares of this day,
the troubles of this year,
and the long season of violence and disaster
that seems to have settled upon us.

It's as though a thousand voices were moaning and crying,
weeping and lamenting,
groaning and sobbing
out of disappointment and fear,
loneliness and sorrow.

One voice is heard above all the others,
one voice that says: Come back to me.

The media loudly tempts us with glamour and pleasure,

The culture calls us to wealth, power, and independence.

Pride seduces us to look out for number one.

Fear whispers in our ear that there might not be enough, "keep it" "save it" "hold it."

Pleasure lures us to eat, to drink, to pleasure in another because it makes us feel good and there is so much pain.

Envy beckons to see what others have without thought of our own gifts.

And anger roars inside us ready to lash out at the simplest offence.

Above all that din one voice calls to us: "Come back to me."

One prophet reminds us that our only recourse is to God.

Only God brings peace, quiets the noise, and stirs our Joy.

The prophet speaks of a trumpet call and he rallies us to action.

Notice that the call is to all of us,
the whole church, not just one or two. here or there.

This season is no lonely struggle for individuals;
but a collective, common effort of all God's people.

The struggle against sin is not one we win alone,
for our victory is found only in our oneness in the Body of Christ.

Just as each one's sins affect the rest,
so do each one's good works bring hope and comfort to all.

It begins now, our forty days of renewal,
our time to make more simple these complicated lives
that pull us in every direction at once day in and day out.
Lives that seem to have no focus, no direction, no centers

are lives that cause others to say: "Where is their God."

Now it begins with one voice: "Come back to me." It says.

"Come back to me with all your heart."

No Audio Available

44

1st Sunday of Lent

3/9/2003

Genesis 9:8-15 + 1 Peter 3:18-22 + Mark 1:12-15

Fr. Boyer

On Lent's first Sunday,
the Gospel tells us something about God
something about Jesus,
and something about ourselves.

What first seems harsh on God's part
with the "driving" of Jesus into the desert and his "testing" there,
really reveals God's intention to preserve and care for those
who find themselves tested and tempted
by the ministry of the "angels"
who protect and comfort those experience this time of trial.

If ever there was an effort to suggest that Jesus "had it made" as God's Son
and was somehow on the fast-track to perfection,
Mark makes haste to clear that notion from our heads.
Yet there is more to Mark's dimension of Jesus
than simply showing us the human condition Jesus experienced.
This combat with Satan does not end here,
but this story validates Jesus as the one who will complete the battle
as the combat goes on.
Victorious here, he has the credentials or the experience to be victorious to the end.

"Forty days" is a long time.
Figurative, poetic, symbolic, it does not mean thirty-nine and counting.
It means, "a long time."
I've begun to suspect that our desert time is our life-time.
It's not that the desert is an ugly place or always frightening,
but it isn't our place it is not the place for which we have been created.
Paradise is (to use Biblical language) - and this isn't it.
We have been "driven" here if you will think of the Genesis image
of what happened as a result of that sin.
But faith tells us that this desert is not where we shall forever be found.
But this is the desert time - the time of testing, trial, and temptation,
and it lasts a long time, perhaps even a life-time.

These forty spring-time days are an opportunity
to look around at where we find ourselves;
to take a deep breath and revise our plan for how we are going to get out of here;
and take a good look at the guide, Jesus Christ
who finally baptized and anointed with the Spirit
survives the desert and its temptations
to lead those who repent and believe into what he calls: The Kingdom of God.

The image Mark gives as a portrait of Jesus in the desert is a mirror of ourselves.

It is the authentic Christian life:

wild animals at our feet and angels of mercy just overhead.

In this year's Lent, instead of concentrating only on ourselves

our sins, our need for repentance,

we might concentrate on this image of Jesus

suspended between heaven and hell.

It is a time of suspense and conflict filled with awesome possibilities.

This gospel drama on Lent's first Sunday

proposes that we move closer to Christ Jesus

and trust the mercy message of these angels

rather than fear the beasts or doubt our victory.

As we turn the page in Mark's Gospel,

Jesus emerges from the desert to begin his journey seeking people who are willing to repent and believe.

That journey will take a turn through Jerusalem

with a stop at Calvary and pause in tomb.

But for those who keep their eyes on the angels

and those who walk with Son of God,

that will not be the end of the journey.

It will simply be the end of desert.

No Audio Available

45

2nd Sunday of Lent

3/16/2003

Genesis 22: 1-18 + Roman 8: 31-34 + Mark 9:2-10

Fr. Boyer

We tell stories of faith today,
stories that lead us deeper into Lent and toward its finish at Easter.
We hear the warning of Mark to tell the vision to no one
until after the resurrection,
because mystical visions of glory are not enough;
because faith that survives suffering and trial is real faith,
"Resurrection Faith";
and faith that springs from visions of glory is hardly faith at all.

We think we understand that,
but there is still in us all the temptation to take the short-cut.
That's what Peter wanted to do in this Gospel passage.
"Let's build a booth (tent)."
In other words, let's stop here and capture this moment.
Forget about that trip to Jerusalem
and that "handing over/suffering stuff".
Those disciples are into this power and glory business.
They want nothing to do with what Jesus has been hinting at
in terms of suffering and death.
But it shall not be so says Mark.

Abraham has had an easy time of it.
Oh, there were times of discouragement after a long childless marriage,
when others would surely have teased and ridiculed his manhood
and Sara would have suffered the indignity of "barrenness" as the Bible calls it, but by and large, things
have gone well for them, no great test of faith until that day of sacrifice.
The greatness of Abraham's faith lies in his ability to suffer,
his willingness to suffer,
and his constancy with God when he doesn't understand why.
Until he passed through that horrible day on the mountain,
his "faith" wasn't Faith at all.

Abraham and disciples of Jesus after the Resurrection
have this in common:
they have faced suffering, lived through it, and been raised up
with hope intact and faith assured.
For them there was no short-cut.

It is easier to hail Jesus as a wonder-worker,
filled with power and gifts by his Father.
It is easier to follow him as the one who can solve all our problems
by an easier method than the cross, but he will not do it.

He will not come down from that cross.
We are misled if we expect it.
It is easier to say "I believe in God,"
after looking at the glories of creation,
the stars, an autumn morning, a new born baby, the face of a lover
than to say: "I believe in God," after looking at one's sick or dying child,
a horrible accident, or live with one's own pain filled life.
It is harder when we stay on earth and look around
taking in suffering humanity,
but we have to learn that this too is the place to see Jesus:
this too is his body, broken and dead.

For faithful disciples of Christ Jesus,
there is no stopping in glory and no faith in it either.
Not until we have stood in the face of suffering and death
and claimed our victory over it shall we truly be believers.
Many experience terrible suffering
and because they have stopped short with the vision of glory
lose their way, their hope, and their life.
It cannot be so for us.
We tell this story today as a challenge to ourselves
and a warning not to look for the short-cut nor be willing to stop here.
For those willing to identify with Jesus, the future has not come;
and in order to enter into future glory,
one must go through the destiny of discipleship.
Declaring that Jesus has risen is only believable
from those who have been on the mountain,
and I don't mean Tabor, I mean Calvary.
If the Resurrection means anything at all,
it means that those who follow Jesus in faith
can go hopefully into suffering and death
not just with words, but with the deeds of their lives.
No Audio Available

46

3rd Sunday of Lent

3/23/2003

Exodus 20:1-17 + 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 + John 2:13-25

Fr. Boyer

Mark has led us this far into Lent;
but now he passes us on to John who will be our guide
until Palm Sunday.

Quickly we notice the change.

After the precise, orderly details of Mark,
we suddenly must deal
with the emotions and the stirring images of John's Gospel.
From Cana and it's wild wedding feast
we move to Jerusalem with its somber and serious Temple business.
From a family celebration in a home,
to the somber courts of Jerusalem's Temple,
signs of change filled with promise sweep off these pages
into our hearts and minds.

Water to Wine. Temple of Stone to Temple of Flesh.

All woven together with signs and wonders
leading people to believe.

But John tells us that Jesus is wise to them.

He knows human nature.

He knows this crowd that gathers for a show,
for excitement, for free food,
or the chance to be seen where ever the action is.

He was a sensation,
and he knew that as long as he engaged the Pharisees and Scribes,
in controversy and debate, people would hang around for the fun of it.
He knew too that if he turned the talk to self-denial and service,
the crowd would thin.

When he talked about a cross they stared in blank disbelief,
and many left him on the spot,
not even waiting to find out what it might mean.

He knows human nature.

He knows that people can be swept away in emotion and then back out when they start to realize what
it means to follow Jesus.

He knows human nature hungers for sensation,
and so he is not very interested in cheering crowds
who have no clue of what he is really about.

He prefers a small company who know what they are doing
and are prepared to follow him to the end.

Not much has changed when it comes to human nature.

It is possible that we might find among us those who come

when it's easy and convenient, when they feel good, or feel like it;
who are at church for what they can get out of it,
who stay when the message brings comfort,
but storm out when it brings challenge or questions their way of life,
their politics, or their comfortable identity.
Talk of service, talk of giving, talk of sacrifice still makes some
look at their watches or look for the door.
Human nature would still turn religion into sentimental, feel-good,
"it's all about me" celebrations;
but with this Jesus who messes up things in the Temple,
it shall be so.
He will call from that place and that crowd
people who will be there for the long -haul,
people who know the way to Calvary,
and find that service of others is better than service of self.
These will be the ones whose lives become signs and wonders.
Rather than asking for miracles they become one.
Their lives will be miraculous and their faith will bring awe.
They will make love the power that mends a broken body
and heals a broken heart.

In John's Gospel, miracles reveal something
about the nature and character of God.

In John's Gospel, the power of Jesus is used to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to comfort the
sorrowing; and the very fact that Jesus did use His power in that way was the proof that God cared for
the sorrows and the needs and the pains of every man and woman.
That power is ours now - at least it belongs to those who are here to stay,
who understand where Jesus will lead,
and who are not put off by the cross and the tomb.
For them, church will not be a country club or entertainment complex;
but an assembly of the powerful and the faithful
who chose to steward God's gifts for everyone but themselves
as God would have it.
For them, faith is not shaken by tragedy or disappointment, but simply challenged to grow stronger.

It is Lent's best message, and Easter's best promise.
No Audio Available

47

4th Sunday of Lent

3/30/2003

2 Chronicles 36:14-17,19-23 + Ephesians 2:4-10 + John 3:14-21

Fr. Boyer

We know very little about Nicodemus.

He shows up suddenly out of nowhere.

He is leader, John tells us.

He is a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin,
so we know before he even begins his questions that he's smart,
savvy, and a thinking man.

He comes at night.

We suspect that it isn't because he's busy all day,
or that Jesus only holds class at night.

He has a lot to loose, because his questions reveal
that he has gone one step further than the rest of the Pharisees.

His questions are not legal.

They are sincere inquiries.

He comes seeking understanding, and he will be back.

The church places him at the center of Lent.

As much as the Samaritan Woman, a man born Blind, and Lazarus
have found a place in Lent's traditions, so has Nicodemus.

Thirsting for truth, he comes to Jesus.

Longing to see, he comes to Jesus.

Seeking life, he comes to Jesus,
and what he receives is revelation of the Divine Mercy.

For Lent's first three Sundays we have pondered
the Covenant and it's commands from our side.

For Lent's final Sunday we shall see it from God's side.

It is still about Faithfulness and Commitment.

It is still about courage in suffering with a vision of victory for us.

For God it is simply about Mercy,

a mercy that astounds and sometimes confounds the powerful
who think only of revenge, punishment, control, and power.

The "depth and the breadth and the height" of God's love
pushes at the limits we sometimes set with our "three strikes you're out"
kind of justice.

Mercy is there and must be there with a God who does not force
anything upon us.

Free to chose, and made that way;

we can accept God's loving gestures, or we can refuse them.

We can move into the mystery of that Divine Mercy
and imitate the one in whose image we are made,

or we can chose otherwise.

In the readings from Chronicles and Psalm 137
we are reminded that before the Israelites could return to their land,
they had to return to God.

In the Gospel, Nicodemus is told
that people can choose to believe or not believe in Christ,
they can prefer darkness to light.
There has always been a choice,
and today that choice is in our face.

It isn't as though many people explicitly choose against God.
These choices we make are far more subtle than that.
It is the little infidelities added one upon another that eventually
lead to a choice.
It is the indifference we show to the message and the messengers
who challenge and call us to mercy, not necessarily any violence.
We silence them and still the message simply by ignoring them,
and keeping ourselves busy with other things.
It isn't that we refuse God, it's just that we're busy with other stuff.
It isn't that we are big sinners, it is simply that we are not big saints.
We're not big at anything.
God gives us choices to make, and sometimes we choose not to choose.

On Lent's fourth Sunday, we are invited to begin -
begin Lent if we did not choose to do so three weeks ago,
begin rebuilding our lives like Israel who repented
after seeing the consequences of their choices.
Our broken lives are not broken forever.
Our broken world is not beyond the reach of God's healing love.
Our broken peace is not without hope of victory;
but it will not be God's victory without mercy.
We can live in a world that celebrates
cooperation rather than competition,
and finds that respect is more true to our nature
than discrimination.
Around this altar we can rejoice in the Love we have been offered
and discover how to share this powerful, healing, forgiving gift.
The choice is ours.
No Audio Available

48

5th Sunday of Lent

4/4/2003

Jeremiah 31:31-34 + Hebrews 5:7-9 + John 12:20-31

Fr. Boyer

They wanted to "see" Jesus all right,

just like the apostles on the mountain top saw him in glory.

They wanted to "see" this rabbi/preacher who was such a sensation.

They wanted to see this one who out talked the Pharisees and humbled the Scribes. And what might they have said after they heard him that talk of falling to the ground and being lifted up?

"Whoa, we just want to see Jesus, not get all involved in this stuff."

"We just want to see Jesus, not get mixed up in this service and forgiveness, this turn the other cheek, this repentance, this losing one's life, this talk of suffering.....Let's see some glory here, some real Power!"

What they get is "thunder": another voice from heaven.

Then the final words: talk of being executed, which is what "being lifted up means to them." I imagine those Greeks were half way back to Athens before the end of that thunder roll.

Of course, this isn't history here, and by the time John writes this Gospel,

plenty of Greeks and other gentiles had come through the apostles and their witness to "see" Jesus; but not with their eyes.

For the "seeing" of Jesus means "understanding" much as when something has been explained to us we say, "Oh, I see."

With that understanding comes then the decision to look and watch or follow and participate. Do these Greeks, you and me who are Gentiles drawn by the witness of the Apostles, want to look or do we want to go further? This Gospel calls us to distinguish between admiring Jesus and following him. It looks at whether or not we just keep our distance, or actually step in and become what we admire.

In John's Gospel there are twenty-six references to "the hour",
by which Jesus means not a time of day,

but the beginning of the reason for which he has come among us:
the redemption of sinners and his return of them to God.

It is as though we have been stolen or sold into slavery,

and now someone has come to set us free and return us to the One

with whom we rightly belong. This the nature of a Covenant - an agreement that ends slavery and binds the one freed to the one who sets free. With Moses, the covenant marked the end of Egypt's slavery and the beginning of Israel's freedom to become God's people.

With Jesus, the new Moses, a greater covenant is struck
that sets free those enslaved to sin. This is our Redemption.

We have come now in Lent to the "hour",

the hour when we shall determine who is here to see and who is here to understand: who is here to look at Jesus, and who is here to become "Christos" (anointed).

In another week we shall begin through ancient prayer and ritual

our celebration of the Covenant that has set us free and marks forever our status as God's own people restored to friendship with God by the redeeming action of Jesus Christ.

It is our "hour" too - when all that he has done for us is claimed,

remembered, and celebrated.

The week we call "Holy" is just that. Time set aside for God alone.

The three days of that week mark the "hour" of our redemption.

The rituals of those days are really simply one great prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving. What begins on Thursday, ends with Easter's dawn when we keep the Great Vigil.

From the washing of feet; to the Passion's Proclamation and Cross's Veneration; to the Light and the Water we drawn.

There is no place for followers of Jesus other than their churches at those hours.

Like disciples who sleep through his prayer in the Garden, some will declare "it is too long", they are "too tired", "three days of prayer in one week is too much."

But I say to you what Jesus says to those who would follow him:

"Stay here and watch with me. The hour has come."

Those who must work those evenings to care for their families

already share in prayer and life of Jesus Christ out of love and service.

Those who are ill also share in the suffering remembered and celebrated here; but those of us who have the gift of time and want to see Jesus more than just look at him will make the week truly "holy".

To take communion week after week and be absent from the celebration that recalls and renews the giving of that gift is puzzling.

To make the sign of the cross and fail to be here to kiss the cross is curious at best.

To recite the Creed and take our place among the Baptized week after week and then ignore the great vigil from which our faith springs like light in the darkness calls into question the communal faith the elect have come seeking here.

With one week to prepare and deepen our Lenten resolves, we set our faces toward Jerusalem and our sights on Jesus Christ. We follow in his footsteps with the assurance that he will be faithful to his promise: "Where I am, there will my servant be."

No Audio Available

49

Passion Sunday

4/13/2003

Isaiah 50:4-7 + Philippians 2:6-11 + Mark 14:1-15:47

Fr. Boyer

It only takes Mark 23 verses to get to the point. In the first chapter, verse twenty-three a demon shrieks: "Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the holy One of God!" With that, the great struggle begins between the Holy One and the Evil One. Fifteen chapters later, the struggle comes to an end. By all appearances at the time, the Evil One has the victory; but it is only a matter of appearances. This time, someone else knows who he is and says so. A centurion speaks the words of the first and the primitive creed; words that acknowledge salvation and confirm our best hopes: that God has come among us and is among us in our most desolate and desperate moments.

Death in this gospel is real. It is neither symbolic nor theological. It is cruel, unjust, swift, and merciless. Death embraces us all. No one shall escape. The death story Mark gives tells of the cruelest death of all. The one closest to the dying Jesus is the enemy - the executioner. Gone are the friends, companions, and loved ones. Shame and fear have had their way. There is no one to comfort him. Innocence is what has been proven by this silly trial, not guilt. There is no justice! Yet right in the middle of this mess we find God says the centurion:

A God who takes a failure to make a Messiah;

A God who takes a death to make Life Everlasting;

A God who takes injustice to make Mercy;

A God who takes sinners to make Saints.

So the end is not the end. The victory does not belong to the demons of chapter one or the Romans of chapter fifteen. It belongs to those who know failure, suffering, death, injustice, and sin. It belongs to those who are abandoned as well as those who hide in shame and fear. This Gospel is as much a story of disciples as it is a story of Jesus. It tells as much about how slow they were to believe, and how they got it wrong again and again as much as it tells about how Jesus got it right.

We have this Gospel to proclaim not just because of the victory of Jesus; but also because those disciples finally got it right. May it be so for us, who are slow to believe, nowhere to be found when there is need, and quick to deny when their risk or danger. My friends, let us make this week Holy, every day of it, not because of what happened in the past in Jerusalem but because of what is happening now in our own lives.

No Audio Available

50

Holy Thursday

4/17/2003

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14 + 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 + John 13:1-15

Fr. Boyer

It is Passover for Jesus as he sits with his companions.

The experience of God's liberating love is real for them.

Egypt is past. Their slavery is at an end.

They sit together and with ritual words and foods, to remember,
and they acknowledge the covenant Moses made with God.

It was a Covenant that secured their place in God's heart
and God's place in their lives.

They eat that meal in symbolic readiness to depart from their enslaved condition.

Tonight we do the same.

We sit in symbolic readiness to depart from our slavery.

We have passed forty days cleaning up and cleaning out our lives.

It is as though we were moving,

and having sorted through what we needed and what we did not need,
the garage sale is over, the dumpster is full,
and our bags are packed.

If we did it any more symbolically, there would be luggage in the aisles.

The best of us would have packed lightly.

They ate unleavened bread.

There was no time for it to rise.

They sprinkled the blood of the lamb on the entrance to their homes
so that the angel of death might pass over them.

We do the same.

No time to rise, this bread we bring is eaten in haste.

We save only enough for tomorrow,

and we care for it more precious than anything else we have,

and tonight we keep watch and guard lest it be taken for granted.

The blood of the Lamb we consume

so that the angel of death might pass over us.

This day is our Passover Feast, and we sit with companions
here and everywhere.

Our slavery to sin and death is at an end.

Our Egypt is past.

We sit together and with ritual words and foods, to remember,

and acknowledge the covenant the new Moses, Jesus, made with God.

It is a Covenant that secures our place in God's heart

and God's place in our lives.

Tonight we eat this meal in very real readiness to depart
with Jesus for the journey into his death and resurrection:

the ultimate and final Passover.

The old sign of one's share in the covenant of Moses was circumcision.
That old covenant and its sign held those people together until God's final act and ultimate plan came of age.

The sign of this new covenant is love made visible by
service and forgiveness:
the washing of feet and the reconciliation of those estranged.

It is both our privilege and our duty
to wash and to heal,
to love and forgive,
to serve and to remember.

No Audio Available

51

Good Friday

4/18/2003

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 + Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 + John 18 1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

If all our minds can see today is pain, blood, and dying,
then we have failed to understand the Passion of Christ.

Reducing this event to the senseless murder of an innocent man
misses the point entirely.

Take care not to ponder this death through guilt-conscious eyes
that would exaggerate its brutality.

Becoming preoccupied with the anatomical/medical details
and the production and interest in the physiological consequences
of being nailed and hung up on a cross avoids the real issue here.

Beware too of approaching this event with only the mind
toying with the theological implications it presents.

To do any or all of these things trivializes God's mercy.

Nothing here is about us, that is idolotry.

This is about God!

A human being died

- that is the point of affirming that blood and water flowed from his side.

Human beings die all the time,

and truth be told, many of them die worse deaths,

Human beings are executed all the time,

and too many of them are just as innocent of any crime.

The agony of Jesus, by some accounts lasted three hours.

Many are in agony for decades.

The "Place of the Skull" is a tiny plot.

There are greater ones in our history.

And that's the point - this is about Mercy, God's Mercy, not about our cruelty, our injustice, our
betrayals, our fear, or our sins.

The burden he has carried up that hill was not just a load of wood.

It was the burden of our lives.

The cross is more than a reminder of betrayal and anguish.

It is the throne of Mercy.

The cry of Jesus on the cross is not just the scream of agony.

It is the cry of one giving birth.

To look at the cross is to see the face of God.

To look at the cross is to peer into the very interior life of God.

To do anything else or see anything else

is to miss the whole point of Jesus.

The Passion story we have just proclaimed begins in a garden
and ends in a garden.

In the first garden we find the forces of military and political power ready to put down this movement of

liberation.

There is no Judas to identify him - he simply utters the ultimate words of power once before spoken from a burning bush as that first movement of liberation began. He says: "I AM"; and with that all the powers lined against him fall to the ground in disarray.

In the presence of "I AM" there is no other power.

Then the Passion story concludes in another garden
as Nicodemus comes out of the darkness
and joins Joseph of Arimathea.

These new children of Light do more than bury the body of Jesus.

They plant a seed in this garden that will soon burst forth:
the victory of light over darkness.

This day is not about death. It is about life.

The appropriate sentiments of those who see and understand the cross
as the throne of grace and mercy are Joy and Hope;

where Peace reigns over violence

and Mercy is embraces the sinner.

No Audio Available

52

Easter Vigil

4/19/2003

Romans 6:3-11 + Mark 16:1-7

Fr. Boyer

By the clock, it is still night.

If someone threw the right switch, it would be dark in here.

It is dark outside.

The darkness is not just a matter of the position of the sun.

There is plenty of darkness even at noontime.

It is very dark in the life of simple Iraqi child.

It is dark in the lives on death row.

It is dark in some churches where there are no priests.

It is dark in the lives of families split by the death of love's promise.

It is dark in the heart of a mother who loses a child.

It is dark minutes after losing a job.

It is dark standing over the grave of a life-long companion just put to rest.

All of these dark tragedies are ripe for resurrection;

but not necessarily very soon.

For some, relief may never come.

If left to itself, darkness covers the whole earth.

The light comes only when it finds a crack of future hope.

Tonight, we have made a crack in the darkness.

Our future hope, our confidence in God, our covenant in the blood of Christ raises high the tiniest of lights

in the darkness that would consume all.

We have led thirty-eight people into the Light of Christ, and in doing so, have pushed back the darkness even further, for now there is more light than when we began.

But the light in symbol is only a candle:

fragile light when the wind blows as it always does.

Yet in our hope and in our faith, these fragile tongues of fire will themselves harness the wind of a new Pentecost of the Spirit

that will finally light up the whole world

by our joy, our hope, and our love

that will lead those still in darkness into the light.

Christ is risen, my friends.

He has come from the darkest of tombs to become our light.

For us then, night has become like the day.

The power of darkness is no more.

No Audio Available

53

Easter

4/20/2003

Acts 10:34,37-43 + Colossians 3:1-4 + John 20:1-9

Fr. Boyer

No talking angels in John's Gospel, just three people:

Mary of Magdala, Peter, and "the other disciple".

They all three see the same thing; an empty tomb,

and they each have a different reaction:

one is concerned, one is confused, the other believes.

We are left by John to wonder on this believer's feast about the difference between them.

A closer look at the details reminds us that this one "who is loved" is the believer, and we are left to suspect that somehow love and belief are to be found together.

People who experience love are open to the miraculous.

What they discover in love is that the unexpected is possible;

that saying "yes" in love rather than "no" opens their hearts and their eyes to see what others cannot see

and believe in things others never dreamed of.

It is the same for believers.

They are not closed to any possibility - like lovers.

They greet the unexpected with eyes open to the miraculous.

Lovers and Believers alike can take painful surprises, disappointments, tragedies, and even death without confusion or undue concern.

The unexpected, the unexplained, the unplanned, even the unwanted finds them looking for the surprise, the miracle, the joy for which others would be too skeptical or doubtful.

To look at that tragic death and believe required love.

To look at that empty tomb and go beyond confusion and concern required love, which becomes belief.

Seeing is not believing. They all saw the same thing.

It is the lover who believes.

This then is the feast of believers, the feast of the loved.

It can only mean something to those whose eyes are open and whose hearts expect the wonder and the power of God

to bring victory and peace, joy and healing.

Yet there are many who look for the miracle in all the wrong places.

The miracle that draws us here in such great crowds is only found in an empty tomb. It is not found in power, control, authority, money, weapons, size or strength. It is found only in love, the kind of love we have remembered the past two days - the love of service, of sacrifice, and the love of obedience to the will of God.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul has reminded us to keep our hearts set on greater things. The disciple

who saw and believed had his heart set on greater things. Those who work against incredible odds to bring about justice in a little corner of the world are able to do so because they have set their hearts on greater things. Those who live with compassion and patient understanding, who know the power of forgiveness, and the healing balm of mercy have set their hearts on greater things. These are the ones who see and believe, who expect miracles and see them, who can look at every tragedy and know with confidence that good will come, grace will prevail, and love will last.

So today, in this place made holy by fire and light, water and blood, bread and forgiveness, we have crowded together like Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the "one who is loved" to look into the empty tombs, of broken hearts and empty lives. What we see can confuse us, concern and frighten us, or it can lead us to believe that having been loved by God, the best we can hope for and all we have been promised will be ours.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

No Audio Available

54

2nd Sunday of Easter

4/27/2003

Acts 4:32-35 + 1 John 5:1-6 + John 20:19-31

Fr. Boyer

There is a dangerous way of hearing this Gospel story that would lead us to suspect that God favored a chosen few with an experience of the risen Christ, and the rest of us simply had to take it on their word.

If that were the case,

Thomas would just have had to make it on the word of the others.

But notice that he is not left to believe that Christ is risen because of "here-say".

He believes it because he has his own experience of the Risen Christ.

It is not a matter of touching - notice that he never does.

It is a matter of seeing.

What the Gospel story tells us

is that Thomas, in spite of absence and in spite of doubt

is able to join the others in saying: "We have seen the Lord."

What I suspect is that before that day, Thomas was not looking.

At least, he was not looking either in the right place,

or was not looking for the Risen Christ.

For that matter the others were not either, after all,

they were sitting in a room with the doors locked.

Thomas may well have been out the first time Christ appeared looking for the dead body of Christ.

He may have been taking another look at the empty tomb.

He may still have been looking the political Messiah

who was going to set everything right.

The point of the story is that, Thomas has an experience of the Risen Christ.

From what he says, he is looking for a dead Christ:

one who has all the scars of death.

What he finds, what he sees is the Risen Christ.

It is Easter again in this place, my friends,

not because the calendar says so or because Lent is over;

but because there are some here who have seen the Lord,

and some who are here because they want to see the Lord,

and they are looking.

It is always Easter

when the risen Lord is among us.

It is always Easter

when people who are one in mind, and heart, and faith

look into each other's eyes and share what they have:

bread, wine, hope, joy, money, kindness, and forgiveness.

It is always Easter

when we see people who accept suffering with dignity and courage

when we look upon the old and children, the most vulnerable among us,
and stand together to protect them.

It is always Easter when
we recall how we have been forgiven,
and rejoice in the times we have forgiven.

This world and our lives are charged with the glory of the resurrection.

What we need are eyes to see the risen Lord in our midst
and willing hearts to call Him by name.

That gift is the Spirit He sends us from the Father.

When we have it, when we know it, when we use it,
we will have seen the Lord.

No Audio Available

55

3rd Sunday of Easter

5/4/2003

Acts 3:13-115,17-19 + 1 John 3:1-7 + Luke 24:36-48

Fr. Boyer

Last week we took up John's version of an appearance of the risen Christ. This week it is Luke.

The verses today follow the Emmaus story.

The two disciples are the ones who met him on their "way".

They have now returned to Jerusalem with their story.

The Jesus who has reviewed the scriptures and eaten with them does it again.

They are still in that room terrified and unbelieving.

It is their shame that holds them back.

It is the memory of their failure that they recall,
not what he promised them.

All they seem to remember is that they abandoned him.

All they could see is failure, theirs and his.

Their messianic dreams and expectations are over.

The cross was the end of that.

They thought it was all about them;

and the truth of their failings is more than they can bear,
so they hide.

In their midst comes the risen Christ:

a failed Messiah in the midst of failed disciples,

and what we hear when they come together is talk of forgiveness.

This is the heart of the Christian story.

It is the essence of the Gospel

and the source of belief in the risen Christ

and the greatest joy.

What those disciples came to realize sitting in that room
sharing their shame and admitting their guilt and suffering their terror
was that the whole experience of Jesus had not been about them.

It was not about their messianic expectations.

It was not about their power and their victory over their enemies.

It was not about how loyal they were as disciples.

It was not about their religion either.

It was about God and God's love and God's plan for them.

It was about what God could do with failure and sin.

Until those two making their way to Emmaus had their eyes opened
and one more time went over all that Moses and the Prophets had to say,
they didn't get it.

Until those others in that locked up room had the same experience,
they didn't get it.

But once he came into that room of failure and shame and doubt,

it was different.

Forgiveness became for them the moment of awakening and belief.

He did not avoid them in their guilt nor abandon them in their fear.

He did not reproach their denials of him nor the betrayal.

He never mentioned it. He simply reproached their fear.

Once they experienced that forgiveness

and realized that their failures had not been the end of God's plan,

they understood and were overcome with Joy.

This Easter season can do the same for us.

It is not about those disciples and something that happened in Jerusalem.

This Easter is about us.

We understand their part of the story because we are just like them.

Our denial, our betrayal of Jesus and our quickness to abandon Him is just as real as theirs.

We have just as much to fear as well.

The only difference is that in addition to locking doors,

we set alarms, close the gates, and look the other way

at the failures of justice and the suffering of the innocent.

The wounds of Christ alive in our midst do not interest us.

We want the sentimental Jesus with fair skin, long hair, and gentle voice.

He stands before day in and day out inviting us to see and touch wounds, and he asks us for food.

It is to disciples who have failed that the risen Christ appears.

It is disciples who are ashamed and hiding that Jesus sends forth in Joy.

It is people forgiven and redeemed who inherit the Gospel and its mission.

Our own experience of failure and sin is what puts us in the company

of the saved and the redeemed.

To the eyes of his own and the eyes of his world,

Jesus was a failure - no power, no strength, no miracles.

Yet when he confronted with forgiveness the failures of others,

he was exalted; and they came to believe.

Our best prayer this third Easter day is that it may be so again:

that he may come into this room or our homes or our hearts

with that message of Peace and that mission of forgiveness.

When we have come to know that Peace, we shall believe in the risen Lord

not because someone told us about it,

but because we have known it ourselves.

No Audio Available

56

4th Sunday of Easter

5/11/2003

Acts 4:8-12 + 1 John 3:1-12 + John 10:11-18

Fr. Boyer

This familiar image carries some profound ideas about Jesus from John's perspective, and some specific implications for us as well.

This gospel isn't about shepherds.

It's about the risen Christ: his self-understanding and his mission.

Therefore it begins to be about us, or about any who would make themselves one with Christ and take up a share in his mission.

We do no justice to John's Gospel by reducing these verses to sentimental portraits of pastoral landscape with soft lighting and lovely clean robes on a man with flowing hair.

This Gospel is about the Passion, Death, and Resurrection, and it is John's image of Christ that we hear of today:

the Christ who is no victim,

who is not murdered or put to death by someone else,

but who is in charge from the very beginning of his passion,

who willingly suffers, willingly goes to his death,

willingly lays down his life, all in order to take it up again.

It is willingness that John shows us -

a Jesus who makes choices for the sake of others

who is obedient to the wish and will of his father/God

who understands that to lay down one's life out of love

is to rise up in the Kingdom of God.

This image is not for admiration.

It is for imitation.

It proposes to us that we make choices,

and that by those choices we shall find our place and our way into the Kingdom of God.

To lay down one's life is the way to rise up.

Service, Sacrifice, Love given freely: this is what we proclaim as Gospel

A life laid down is a life raised up.

The command Jesus received and speaks of in the last verse of today's passage is not just his own.

Those who will be one with him, one flock, one shepherd

will have the same command.

Those who will come here to eat his flesh and drink his blood

share his command.

Those who have gone with Him willingly to the grave of baptism

rise up with him to glory.

This is what we proclaim this Easter day.

Our Gospel is not about the past, but about the present.

It is not simply a story about Jesus;

about what he said and what He did.

It is about the present and what he continues to do in us.

It is about our future and who shall become children of God.

It is about the world coming to know Him because it comes to know us.
No Audio Available

57

5th Sunday of Easter

5/18/2003

Acts 9: 26-31 + 1 John 3:18-24 + John 15: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

Those of us who have grown up hearing this gospel passage over and over again can easily grow comfortable with the image.

We have all heard countless homilies about unity and fruitfulness; and believe me;

I've done my homework in past years about the care of vines and fruitfulness.

I've begun to discover that all of that reflection was, in the end, just a distraction; an intellectualizing of the gospel that might make its demands less pressing.

It's easy to sit back

and think about vines and branches and grapes and wine.

It doesn't take a degree in theology to find out that this is a time/worn image used in the Old Testament and a favorite of rabbis and prophets to describe Israel.

It gets carried into the New Testament to suggest that there is a wild vine that doesn't produce and a "True" vine that does.

But when you finally exhaust all of that stuff,

have analyzed all the "I AM" passages of John's Gospel,

there is nothing left but the human experience that must have given rise to this image in that community from which John's Gospel springs.

I have a strong feeling that they were dealing with two issues that just did not go away with time, and so they leaned back on their collective memory of Jesus to keep their focus and maintain some balance in their lives.

One of the issues is "dead wood"; the stuff that gets pruned away.

In the context of a community, this is a delicate and sensitive issue; yet it is one we ought not avoid.

There is dead wood here - it weighs down the fruitful branches - takes up space and blocks the life-giving light from the living/fruitful branches.

Every time we hear this gospel, we need to wonder about ourselves and whether or not we have become "dead wood" on this vine.

The other issue haunts us more

than the community that shaped this Gospel.

It is that issue of independence, of being isolated, cut off, and on our own.

It is that illusion of being self-made and self-confident.

It is the folly of thinking we can make it on our own.

It is wrong thinking and wrong acting that threatens our nation, our neighborhoods, and the very roots of our faith.

We cannot and ought not think we can "go it alone."

Isolationism in politics, Congregationalism in religion, and Individualism in personal behavior, all dressed up under the guise of "freedom"

is a pretense that leads us away from the truth of this Gospel.
It makes dead wood.

"Without me you can do nothing."

Herein lies the truth of this Gospel.
Being one with Jesus necessarily makes us one with each other.
Nothing that we do is without consequence in the lives of others.
That is what it means to be a vine.
To think that we can do anything or say anything without affecting everyone else is to be "dead wood."

Believing in the name of Jesus Christ is no private, personal issue.
As soon as that belief is experienced says the second reading,
we are connected with each other.
When Paul came to believe in Jesus,
he could not stay away or remain away from that group in Jerusalem.
This Gospel then is not so much about vines as it is about relationships.
If it is about Jesus and his identity,
then it is also about us and our identity.
To hear and believe in this Gospel
leaves us with the challenge of acknowledging our relationships
to one another.
It calls into question our very presence here.
It examines the depth of our commitment
and the measure of our stewardship.
It exposes the lie of false freedom as "independence"
with the truth of responsibility and duty.
It examines "choice" outside the boundaries of one's own little life.
It forces us from the shadows of lonely isolation
to the light of truth, and into the glory of God's own life.
No Audio Available

58

Ascension of the Lord

6/1/2003

Acts 1:1-11 + Ephesians 4:1-13 + Mark 16:15-20

Fr. Boyer

A contemporary spiritual writer has suggested that in this age of time we have three classes of Christian people.

The first are the "aristocrats" of sort.

They live with solitude and contemplation.

They have a special relationship with God.

Many live in convents and monasteries. Some are hermits.

They most often live apart from us, and some are sought for their wisdom.

They are genuine their gift benefits us all.

The second are the "bourgeoisie", to continue using that vocabulary.

They are a kind of high society - upper middle class.

They have aspirations, goals, hopes, and plans.

They can retire to their private rooms to think about God

because they have private rooms.

They can go on retreats, by and read spiritual books.

They can go to Bible Study classes and Adult Education classes about religion because in general they have something they often take for granted. They have a wonderful gift too.

It is called: "Time."

The third group includes most of the other people on this earth.

They live day in and day out in a world that shoves them, pulls them, and sometimes crushes them.

It simply seems to drag them from birth to death.

Now and then they get a glimpse of Christ,

but more often than not they end up feeling dissatisfied.

They do not have "time" like the aristocrats and bourgeoisie.

Their waking hours are spent seeking enough to eat -

not just for themselves, but for their children,

since if they do not eat something, their children will suffer even more.

For this group, time is not a gift for seeking God,

but an extension of their struggle to survive.

Now I have come to believe that the Ascension of the Lord has more to do with TIME than with where Jesus went or what happened on Easter to the Apostles and to the Risen Christ.

It's about TIME: how we use it, and where it takes us.

It is about this time, not the past when Jesus of Nazareth was here,

but about June in two-thousand and three.

It is about today and tomorrow and the time we have to complete our mission as it has been preserved for us in our ancient writings.

The rebuke of the first reading still sounds clear to those who stand around looking at the sky. However tempting it might be, a "wait and see" attitude is not the attitude of disciples.

The consequence of the Ascension is that the goodness of this world is affirmed;

that the way to God is the way of Jesus Christ, obedience, service, love, and forgiveness.

The consequence of the Ascension is that mission of Jesus Christ has become our own.

And so the blind will see.....see the glory of God in a people filled with Joy and with Hope.

And the lame will walk.....walk upright and free from injustice and poverty, from prejudice and racism.

And the lepers will be cleansed.....and all those pushed to the edges of life will be restored to their place in the heart of God.

And the poor will have the Good News preached to them.... the poor who have no hope and no choices, no opportunities, and no time.

It would appear that most of us in St. Mark Parish are, in Michael Quoist's analysis, the bourgeoisie. We have time either because money has purchased this kind of leisure or our birth-right has left us here. In this assembly today, the Word we proclaim stuns us with the expectations God seems to have of us. In the glorification of Christ, in his being taken up into heaven away from us, the plan, the will, and the intention of God becomes perfectly clear.

An English Hymn writer (Fred Pratt Green) put it this way:

"The Church of Christ in every age,
Beset by change, but spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage,
And keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street
the victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat
And never live before the die.

Then let the servant church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humility.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood,
And teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.

For we have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord;
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.

No Audio Available

59

Pentecost

6/8/2003

Acts 2:1-11 + Galatians 5:16-25 + John 15:26-27, 16:12-15

Fr. Boyer

Most of us take the account of Pentecost as Luke tells it as the central text of this day. Visual and sensate as we are, tongues of fire, descending doves, and a mighty wind is easy to deal with. Artists through the ages have made it so. There isn't anyone among us, I suspect who could not close their eyes and visualize what Luke speaks of. We have also come to expect that spirit filled assemblies are highly animated, demonstrative, and enthusiastic. We have rallies before contests to build up the "spirit". The louder they are, the more energetic they become leads us to judge them to be "spirit-filled". Yet, an American lynch mob or an urban gang rally could be pretty spirit filled too. A rock concert in Lloyd Noble Center is too.

At the same time, a lone person kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, or a devout parent lighting a candle with prayer for a troubled child is without doubt filled with the spirit. A community of monks or nuns filing quietly into a monastery church raising their voices in song is just as much a vehicle of the spirit as turning up the decibels with electric thumping that you can here five blocks away. The test of the Spirit's presence is not fire, wind, doves, noise, wild enthusiasm, physical animation, or high-pitched emotions. The test of the Spirit's presence among us is whether Jesus Christ is made known. That does not require extra ordinary phenomena like speaking in tongues or courageous missionary zeal. The people most filled with the Holy Spirit in my life, the people who have most clearly and convincingly borne evidence to the presence of Jesus Christ have been anything but loud, pushy, zealous enthusiasts. On the contrary, they have been people who forgive and bring peace; whose mere presence or hospitality brings comfort; whose words are filled with compassion never reproach. They are people who suffer various disappointments and tragedies with confident courage, whose prayer is steady and unselfish. Their compliments replace the complaints and criticism of others.

The central text on Pentecost Day is not Acts of the Apostles. It is the Gospel. The words of Jesus about the Spirit, about what this "Advocate", whom the Father sends will do is what matters today. "HE WILL TESTIFY ON MY BEHALF", says Jesus. In other words, more plainly, he STAND IN for Jesus. That is what an Advocate is - someone who knows the part, who speaks and acts in the place of someone else.

This Gospel comes from the Farewell Discourse. He is leaving, but only to send this world a greater presence, one not limited to a single body present in one place at one time. Luke's testimony is to the fulfillment of that promise. It is not a description of the event. Luke's testimony is that stumbling, doubt-filled, slow to believe, very common fishermen, tax collectors, and sinners can make known the presence of Christ and realize the promised signs of the Kingdom of God. It does not mean they speak in tongues or can give great orations to huge crowds. It means that when anyone has been around them they will know they have been touched by Jesus.

In this assembly today, there is Spirit, plenty of it, and we don't need to make a spectacle of our selves to know it. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control: signs of the Spirit. I'll take those over tongues of fire and a mighty wind any day. As Paul says: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit."

No Audio Available

60

Holy Trinity

6/15/2003

Deuteronomy 4:32-3,39-40 + Romans 8:14-17 + Matthew 28:16-20

Fr. Boyer

Any way you look at it, as a disciple of Jesus Christ,
as a theologian or as a philosopher,
thinking about the Trinity
inevitably leads to reflections about relationships.

It is more than a theological concept.

It is more than a metaphysical exercise.

It is the core of our creed over which blood has been spilled,
and countless hours of study, rhetoric, and deliberation mark
our history with councils in far off places looking again and again
at this wonder of God's self giving and self revelation.

I avoid the word: "Mystery."

It leads us to suspect that we cannot understand,
and then we excuse ourselves from the wonder and awe it can stir in us.

Understanding is not the issue.

Experience is.

This is the experience that marks the Christian.

Just as touching a door post and reciting the shema marks the Identity of Jews, and facing the direction
of the holy shrines with one's forehead on the ground marks Islam, the Sign of the Cross marks the
Christian. In gesture and in word, the Creed is proclaimed, the bond is renewed, and the experience is
acknowledged.

The experience of the Trinity is the ultimate acknowledgement of God's Loving presence. The three
most essential questions that lurk in the depth of the human soul are stilled by the experience we call
Trinity.

Do you love me?

How much do you love me?

Will you be here tomorrow?

The God of the Christian tradition speaks to the human soul and quiets the fear and anxiety that these
questions sustain.

"Do you love me?"

"As much as I love myself", says the God in whose image we are made.

"How much do you love me?"

"Enough to send my only Son to be with you in your darkest hours."

"Will you be here tomorrow?"

"My Spirit will be you everywhere and forever."

No mystery here except the mystery of unconditional love
which with our best efforts, we just can't quite master.

No mystery here except the mystery of love's power
to forgive and to heal.

This day calls us to wonder and stand in awe

before the God-gift we have received.

This day calls us to raise our hands again more confident than ever that we who are signed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are a people embraced in love.

More than chosen, we claimed as God's own and exist in the intimacy of the divine family: because "God so loved the world."

We celebrate this feast after Easter and after Pentecost.

The risen Christ and the Spirit complete for us the experience of God we have been given.

The God we acknowledge and have come to know day in and day out is a God locked in with humankind.

We believe in One God we are about to say:

a God who is one with us,

a God who knows no distinction between heaven and earth.

a God who by the power of the Spirit wills to be known, to be seen, to be heard, to be loved.

Our life in the Trinity expresses our own identity and our mission in these days following Pentecost.

We are sent, now as was Jesus to reveal this God we have come to know

and to let others see what we have seen,

that they too may become children of God

and share in our inheritance.

All they will see, all they will hear, all they will know is you and me.

To see the children is to see the Father.

No Audio Available

61

Body and Blood of Christ

6/22/2003

Exodus 24:3-8 + Hebrews 9:11-15 + Mark 14:12-16,22-26

Fr. Boyer

The Old Testament gives us the source of our reflections today as the Church celebrates the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ.

With the reading from Exodus we are drawn deeper into the mystery and wonder of Covenant with God.

With the images and memory of Exodus fresh in our minds, we move into the heart of this Feast to acknowledge that the Body and Blood of Christ is about Covenant first and foremost.

The constant risk and challenge this annual feast puts before us is the risk of stopping short of what is revealed and failing to move through the symbols toward the truth to which they lead.

Exodus focuses on the ritual of blood and word.

It is familiar to us. We do it in the place.

This ritual is not about the Last Supper, Consecrated Bread and Wine, Transubstantiation, or any of those related things.

The ritual of blood and word that we follow here

is for the same purpose as the ritual Moses and the people of Exodus followed.

It is for the sake of Covenant with God.

Consecration of the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is for the sake of Covenant, not for the sake of taking Holy Communion.

We take Holy Communion because we are a people of the Covenant.

To focus on the symbol and not go where it points

is to trivialize or neglect the real revelation found in the symbols.

This is a present reality.

We are not re-enacting something that happened in the past.

This is not an instant replay.

Every year in certain historical locations, people dress up in costume and re-enact battles of the Civil war or the War of Independence.

This is not like that. This is the real thing for today and for this hour.

Our times and culture day in and day out bear witness to covenants broken and disposed of. As a consequence, it is a good thing to celebrate this Feast and acknowledge what it proclaims. Unlike the oaths we take only to perjure ourselves, and the treaties we sign only to ignore when the powerful partner finds it unprofitable or inconvenient, this is Covenant, not contract, nor oath, nor treaty.

This is about relationships and identity.

It is more about being than doing.

Ancient peoples used a ritual of sacrifice that involved blood because of its once and for all nature. The finality of death for the victim sacrificed, and the mutual sharing of its blood made the covenant a "once and for all" - "no going back" kind of statement.

Those ancient people split the victim of their sacrifice and walked together between the halves - agreeing that a similar consequence should befall the one who breaches the covenant.

Those ancient ones understood "blood" as the essence of life.

The blood of the victim bound them together in life and for life.
Then those ancient peoples shared a meal in the belief that those who ate together were bound as partners and protectors of one another for life.

When the Church assembles for the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, it assembles for more than an affirmation of the symbols.

We are not here simply to affirm our belief in the presence of Christ in Bread and Wine. We are not here to casually stroll up the aisle and take a piece of consecrated unleavened bread.

We are here for the sake of Covenant,
the Covenant that this Body and Blood establishes.

There is nothing casual or informal about what happens here.

It is awesome and profound. It is divine.

This is the essential, distinct Catholic experience of the Eucharist.

We are not re-enacting the Last Supper. We are not "taking" communion,
nor are we having a private and intimate personal experience with the historical Jesus.

We are being swept up into divine life,
transformed in the very depths of our being
into a relationship that is blood - like family.

God makes a binding pact with us.

It makes us partners and companions assuring us of a place
at the table and a share in the everlasting banquet of heaven.

It is a costly, painful, and lonely covenant,
but its consequences are greater than its demands.

This is a covenant in our flesh because of what we eat in this place.

It is a covenant in our lives because of what we become in this place.

The Body and Blood of Christ do not simply appear to be bread and wine. They also appear to be the
flesh and blood of those who eat.

This feast leads us through the symbol to the reality.

Those who make that passage can never kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and then turn their back
on the hungry, the poor, or the homeless. To do so disconnects the symbol from that to which it points:
the transforming Covenant into which we are invited by a God who chooses to be with us, in us, and for
us, for always and forever.

No Audio Available

62

Peter and Paul

6/29/2003

Acts 12:1-11 + 2 Timothy 4:6-8 + Matthew 16:13-19

Fr. Boyer

Heroes and heroines tell us more about the society that recognizes them than about the individuals themselves.

They tell us about the likes and dislikes, the prejudices and principles, and the values and priorities of the society in which we find them.

In one society, someone may be hailed as a martyr, while another society may look at the same life and call that person a terrorist.

A hero or heroine could be a public servant, an athlete, a spiritual figure, rock star, or a criminal on the run.

They are often the result of a crisis or tragedy, and no authentic hero or heroine ever set out to be one.

That is the difference between a hero and a celebrity.

The celebrity or "star" becomes so by will or by plan.

The hero and heroine becomes so involuntarily.

Someone asked John F. Kennedy once how he became a World War II hero, and he said: "It was involuntary. They sank my boat."

I read a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson who suggested that a hero is no braver than ordinary people, but they are simply braver for five minutes longer." When boats sink and danger looms and five minutes seems like an eternity, heroes are born.

As a church we assemble today honoring two of our heroes.

They were unlikely candidates early in their lives; and neither of them made any voluntary choice to become heroes.

A fisherman and a tent maker do not seem to be the stuff from which heroes are made, but that is the point.

They were very common, ordinary people made extra ordinary by grace.

The faith that focused their lives, motivated their decisions, finally gave them an identity as Apostles of Jesus Christ was not born of reason or logic but of grace.

We have the same two elements:

we are unlikely candidates for heroism or sanctity, and an honest look at our lives would leave the conclusion that few of us have the stuff that makes heroes heroines.

Yet we have that second element that changes it all.

We have grace, pure gift of God who has called us and made us His own.

It is grace that sustains a father or a mother in the face of a child who does not return their love.

It is grace that brings a man and woman into a holy union
that may have as much challenge and disappointment,
as it has joy and peace.

It is grace that brings hope when a doctor says there is none.
It is grace that sets one free from addiction when all denial
has finally failed to hide the truth.

At the heart of this Gospel today lies the question that affirms this grace.

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Who do you say that I am? asks the homeless, the immigrant,
the addict, the prisoner, the neighbor.

The answer to that question confirms the presence of grace,
and that's all God can do for us.

Then when someone sinks our boat we'll have to see what happens.

Or when we think we can't go on for one more minute,
we go for five.

No Audio Available

63

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/6/2003

Ezekiel 2:2-5 + 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 + Mark 6:1-6

Fr. Boyer

We have to push through this Gospel today and not get snagged on any of the little sidetracks that are there. They are all dead-ends.

This Gospel is not about them. It is about us.

It is not about the people back in the town where Jesus seemed to make his "home."

It is not about the Markan community, who preserved this memory either, even though they were asking the same question we are left ponder.

It is about us.

Whatever their trouble was, the people in that town where Jesus was had a good excuse for their attitude or "disbelief." They lived with the historical Jesus who was at that moment in time a prophetic, wonder/worker, rabbi/preacher who had a somewhat political message and challenged the status quo with a new interpretation of the Law that offered everything for the poor and helpless but nothing for those who had security and some control over their lives. It isn't hard to figure out why they were not interested in this Jesus. We don't choose leaders for this country nor contribute to their campaign funds if they are going to take what we have and give it to someone else. We give our attention, our money, and our votes to those who preserve what we have and get us more. The people in His "native" place lived with Jesus before the resurrection. They were dealing with one of their own as far as they knew.

Had this encounter happened after they witnessed his death and resurrection, it would have been a different issue entirely, and when we read it and look at ourselves, it is a different issue entirely. There is more going on here than peer envy. The people of His native place had no problem about a wise man teaching them about God, and I doubt that they cared if he wanted to call himself God's Son. What they had trouble with is the other way around: that God would be one of them. Jesus as God and God as Jesus are not the same thing. In their favor, until the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, it was not all that clear that God wanted to be one with them. That is why it is different for us. We cannot use their excuse or their innocence. Yet we still try to do so.

The very first heresy was not denying the divinity of Jesus. It took awhile for that to happen. The first heresy was denying that God became human - the thinking that God was just "appearing" on earth as Jesus while remaining the old divine self in heaven. Jesus Christ is not an "appearance" of God for Christian believers. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is not Lord of Heaven - He is Lord of Heaven and Earth. It is this issue that the Gospel confronts. Lord of Earth is the issue, not Lord of Heaven. Jesus can be God in heaven without us, and he was, but come the Incarnation, for God to be Jesus on earth, our participation is needed. That is the problem in that town, his "native" place. They did not participate, and it is still the problem. We have to make Jesus Lord of Earth - without that, flood and fire control nature; without us, evil people determine history. With us, it is not so.

Jesus can work through God without us, but God cannot work through Jesus without us.

That's the point.

That is the incarnation: that God actually became flesh and entered our world. The rest is up to us. We make Jesus Christ the Lord of creation when we steward nature instead of wasting it. When we take care of the earth because we believe that it is God's creation and it is good and it is a gift to us.

We make Jesus Lord of Earth.

When we protect the earth, water, and the air everyone must breathe,
we are believers in God present among us.

We make Jesus Christ Lord of History

when we oppose evil structures and create those that further the kingdom of God - because we are
believers - not in Jesus in Heaven, but of Christ on earth.

We make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives when we let him command what we eat, what we wear, and
drive and say and do every day of our earthly lives.

If we are believers, He is Lord of our lives here and now, today;
not in heaven or at the end of time.

See, that was the problem in his native place.

He was Lord everywhere by there.

We can call him Lord until we're out breath.

We can sing our hymns as loudly as we can crank the volume

and build our churches as big as we want,

but until we make him Lord of our lives it's all a waist,

and until we do, I suspect that he will work no wonders here either

other than maybe cure a few sick people.

No Audio Available

64

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/13/2003

Amos 7:12-15 + Ephesians 1:3-14 + Mark 6:7-13

Fr. Boyer

The prophet of this week had a lot of problems, not the least of which was that he was a layperson, a working man, a herdsman.

Today we would call him a migrant worker.

We would restrict his benefits,

lure him to work for us in jobs no one else wants,

and leave him at the bottom of the pay scale.

He did not come on the scene with any credentials.

He had no degree in theology.

He was not part of the establishment who ran things.

In fact, his authority came not from a title, an earned degree

an ordination ceremony or an "inside group";

but from God's call.

He fits the model of Israel's greatest:

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Moses, even David.

It is a long line of our ancestors who were lay men and women

through whom the plan and purposes of God were accomplished.

Except for Isaiah and Ezekiel, all the prophets were lay people.

It is not much different in New Testament times.

John the Baptist, his cousin, Jesus, and all those

they called to discipleship were, with few exceptions lay people.

They were willing to leave behind the safe and familiar

to set out on a mission for the sake of the good news.

Those we hear about in the Gospel today were not prepared for the work

Jesus gave them.

They did not understand perfectly who Jesus was or what he was doing.

They were full of faults, ambitious, confused,

and they fought among themselves.

Yet Jesus did not wait till they had it all together to send them out.

I think he knew that whatever success they experienced

would not be theirs, but the consequence of his Spirit.

The work they were to do would not be their work, but his.

If he had wanted professionals,

he would have selected scribes or Pharisees.

The biggest difference between Amos and the Twelve

is that the twelve went out two by two,

while Amos went alone.

Going together made it clear that they were not free agents

but members and representatives of a community,

and it assured the truth and validity of their witness.

In spite of this difference however, the message was much the same.
Amos comes to warn the kingdom and its neighbors
against reliance on military power,
social injustice, immorality and shallow religiosity.
Disciples are sent to invite people to rely on God
with the reminder that true authority over life and death is never our own.
They proclaim that Love of Neighbor is as important as Love of God.
As a result, Social Justice is an issue for believing people,
and it becomes a measure of faith just as surely as devotions and prayers.

Disciples of Jesus are not defined by their success.
By the political and power standards of his day, Amos was a failure.
Jesus was a dead man as far as the Romans were concerned,
and a huge disappointment even to some of his friends at first.
Our only failure would be to ignore the mission, to do nothing,
to be silent in face of injustice, violent in the face of conflict,
and miss the example of the one who sends us forth.

My friends, you do not belong to the church.
You do not have a role in the church.
You are the church because you are Baptized.
The mission of the church does not belong to someone else.
It is not my job - it is yours.
Whoever rights wrongs, feeds the hungry, cares for the dispossessed;
Whoever is simple and honest, sensitive toward the countless
heartaches people suffer, and intolerant of injustice is the presence of Christ in this world and the
continuation of his mission.

These efforts must be fueled by passion.
When faith becomes a passion, things change.
Amos was so passionate that even when rebuffed, he would not be silent.
The Twelve were so fired by the passion of Jesus,
so driven by that passion that human comforts were unimportant.
Today, Amos, Jesus, the Twelve, and the author of Ephesians remind us that all of us who have been
chosen by Jesus are called to renew our passions, our purpose, and ourselves.
Perhaps our reflection on their lives
may help us all to retrieve some of the passion and fire that drove them
and is worthy of disciples and people of faith.
No Audio Available

65

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/20/2003

Jeremiah 23:1-6 + Ephesians 2:13-18 + Mark 6:30-34

Fr. Boyer

They had been sent on their mission, these apostles; and it was over.

They came back to report all that they had done
and they were exhausted.

Their rest was a boat ride,
and we have no idea how long it took
much less if it was enough rest.

But when the ride was over, so was the rest.

There are numerous ways to listen to this Gospel,
and all of them have a point or two.

There is something said about a balanced life of rest and work.

There is something said about pity.

There is something said about the crowds
wanting to hear Jesus at all costs and rushing around to do so
wanting to hear Jesus badly enough to skip a meal.

It's all in there.

Heard in the context of this Liturgy with Psalm 23 and Jeremiah 23,
we begin to focus upon Leadership, and that level of the Gospel text
emerges in our consciousness. With it however comes a risk that could easily trip us and send us off in
the wrong direction.

That risk comes from a cultural flaw with which we live,
and it emerges from a level of spiritual immaturity
that poses great danger, and never more so than at the present.

In the two Old Testament passages and the Gospel today, the image of Shepherd is put before us in the
context of leadership. It would be easy, and that's the symptom of immaturity, to think that this
reference is to someone else: in our context, about Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. What can trip us and
send us in the wrong direction is to sit back and think that somehow God is speaking to us about "them"
and that "they" really need to hear these readings.

There is a little element of this Gospel that is easy to miss.....
the Apostles have been out on their mission.

They have finished it and come home.

In the sense of this story, they are finished. It's over.

Yet as the story goes on, there is still work to do.

I believe this Gospel invites us to consider whose turn it is,
or whose is going to do it?

Now you know where God's Word is leading us today.

This Gospel is not about them: the apostles or shepherds.

It is not about Bishops or Priests, good, bad, successful or failures.

It is about us all.

The moment we stand and say: "I believe",
the moment we put out our hand and say "Amen",

the moment we say "Thanks be to God",
we cease to be sheep and become shepherds.

We are the ones who receive the Good News and its power to bring peace.

We are the ones who know that forgiveness brings healing and restores love. We either use it or not.

We are the ones entrusted with the little ones, the vulnerable, the poor, the ignorant, and the homeless.

Parents, you are the leaders in your homes, the shepherds.

If your children grow up without a knowledge of God, do not know how to pray, cannot make a moral decision, have no relationship with the church, you are their shepherds.

If your chief concern is that they get an education and grow up to make a lot of money, the prophet Jeremiah would suggest trouble is coming.

Yet in truth, making a lot of money is no fault.

Not knowing how to use it is.

Single persons living away from parental homes do not pass half a day without someone's need gaining their attention.

Stressed and depressed friends, and lonely parents facing empty homes and losing their youth are your sheep.

There is much to do, and the needs are great. In fact, they are getting greater by the day as injustice increases and an economy that favors the rich is the preference. The truth is that on this earth poverty is growing not wealth, and because there are no shepherds nothing happens.

Nothing happens because too many sit back and think that someone else is the shepherd.

The Gospel is proclaimed, the Prophet speaks, and the Psalm is heard from the heart of God's people.

There is a room full of Shepherds here, more than a thousand will pass these doors today. In this church there is both enormous power and resource, courage and energy, vision and grace. What we choose to do this week and what we become is a matter of faith and spiritual maturity.

The days Jeremiah speaks of are our days. "The righteous shoot to David" has been raised up, and we are the ones who shall gather the scattered, and do what is just and right.

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2 Kings 4:42-44 + Ephesians 4:1-6 + John 6:1-15

Fr. Boyer

For the next several weeks, as happens every third year in the late summer, the church turns to the sixth chapter of John's Gospel.

It is John's "Bread of Life" gospel, and it is a feast for the soul.

Proclaimed in the context of the Eucharist, it is even more so.

If you think of the Liturgy of the Word as a Feast in itself,

it becomes a four-course meal, and the appetizer is the first Old Testament reading.

Today it is the Book of Kings.

Next week we focus on the Manna in the desert as described in Exodus.

Then we hear the story of Elijah being fed and prepared by God for his 40-day walk to Sinai.

A Proverbs text follows Elijah's story,

and the series ends with the renewal of the covenant at Shechem.

During this series, I am going to do something different

since you do not have the texts in your hand or before your eyes.

I am going to preach first and then we shall listen to the text and take a few moments after each reading to reflect and savor

what God's Word says to us.

In that way, you will be prepared for what you hear, since I sometimes think that you have not settled down enough to really hear the first reading. Those who habitually come late are going to have a problem with this, but I can't help that.

There is a detail in the first reading and the Gospel that is important to know for a wider understanding of what is happening and the implications of these texts. Barley bread is the food of the poor. It is course, bitter in taste, but cheaper than the finer grains at that time. Notice too that it is a poor man who is generous in the first reading. It is a poor man who brings his barley bread to the prophet. In the Gospel, it is a boy, another poor man, whose simple, course bread becomes the "stuff" of a miracle.

For the Jews at the time of Jesus, the miracle stories of Elijah were told and retold with great delight by all the people, but especially the poor for whom story telling then just as now was the favorite entertainment since they did have resources for more elaborate fun.

Yet their telling was not just to entertain, but also to affirm that the power of God is at work, and the poor, the needy, and the helpless can count on that power.

Once you realize how popular this cycle of stories was among the Jews, and then begin to see the parallels between the miracle stories of Elisha and Jesus, you can understand why so many people thought that Jesus was the prophet returned.

The major element of the Elijah stories is the conflict with Canaanite religion that tended to identify God with the gifts of a fertile earth. The Canaanites made gods out of the gifts rather than having the gifts lead them to God. The miracles performed by the two prophets: Elisha and Elijah counter that inclination by insisting that Israel's Lord of the Covenant controls the fertility of the earth, the cycle of death and life, and that Lord was the source of all good things.

No stopping at the gifts themselves to make idols of them;

but the force of the story insists that we go through the gifts to the giver.

When we sit with the Word of God on this hot summer weekend,
there are two miracles here to ponder:
two miracles that lead us into the mystery of God.
The first is the miracle of the generous poor.
Those with the least give the most.
Those with the most to lose do not cling to what they have because they trust in God and believe that
God sees their need,
and their God will not leave them.
They preach more powerfully than any prophet or preacher.
Their faith is miraculous.
The second miracle is the response of the servant in the Old Testament
and the disciple/servants in the Gospel.
When they do what God asks,
something they didn't quite believe in happened.
They doubted, feared, and suspected that there would not be enough;
but they went ahead with the plan and the request.
The miracle here is not just the consequences in terms of plenty;
but the fact that their obedience led them from doubt to faith.

May it be so here this day.
May our attentiveness to God's word
move us to discover and imitate the generosity of the poor
and so find us counted among those God favors;
and may our willingness to obey God's command
lead us from faltering faith, fear, and doubt to true faith in God
and a joyful celebration of the bountiful gifts God has for those who hunger for what God provides.
Listen now to the Word of God.
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18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/3/2003

Exodus 16:2-4,12-15 + Ephesians 4:17-20-24 + John 6:24-35

Fr. Boyer

We move into our second week with John's sixth chapter.

Last week, Elijah opened our hearts for the Words of Jesus, and this week we turn to a familiar story from Exodus that prepares us to reap the harvest of John's Gospel.

Again, as I said I would through this series, I want to speak first and let God have the last word!

Remember the vision the apostles had at the Transfiguration.

Jesus Elijah and Moses talking together.

Today we complete the triptych we began last week now adding Moses to our reflection.

Last week it was Elisha and Elijah. This week it is Moses and Aaron.

and these next verses of John 6 are heard in compliment with Exodus.

Manna and quail are common substances, and are a simple phenomenon of nature.

An insect secretion forms at night and falls in flakes from the leaves of the tamarisk thickets in the early morning. The heat of the sun melts them and they are gone by late morning. It tastes sweet but cannot be preserved. It perishes.

Quail migrate twice a year. They make a long over water flight to and from northeastern Europe and Africa. Exhausted from the long over water flight they land in the Sinai Peninsula exhausted and are easily caught.

These are delicacies.

People of faith see in ordinary natural things the providence of a loving God. People without faith are simply entertained by the wonder itself and they want more. Today John shows us this crowd. They want free food. They like the signs and wonders, and have little interest in what this wonder-worker has to say - they just want more entertainment. They are running all over the place looking for Him, not because of who he is, but because of what he can do for them. They are yet to ask: "What is this?" They stop short - they fail to see through the sign to the one who provides. This is the issue in the desert. These people Moses leads have yet to learn reliance on God that will enable them to face and overcome their struggles.

The demand for a sign comes from an Old Testament expectation that a prophet like Moses would come in the last days to work again the Exodus wonders. Now this is the heart of the message coming from a prophet like Moses who is Jesus. In John's Gospel, if one stops short, captivated by the wonder, then one fails to understand the reason for the action: the gracious activity of the Father through the Son.

The people in the desert asked: "What is this?"

They struggled with the identity of this bread.

Their struggle defined their identity.

Perishable food makes perishable people.

Food that lasts forever makes people who live forever.

The people of John's Gospel struggled with the identity of Jesus.
We who feast on this Word of God today may either stand back and wonder about this signs wanting more for ourselves, or we can enter into the struggle over what they mean and where they lead us. That struggle is called "discipleship", and it is the work of God.

Our discipleship demands that we continue to look at what God provides and ask the question: "What is this?"

Look at our jobs, our homes, our possessions, and our relationships - look at it all and ask: "What is this?"

If we do not see past these things and perceive the one who provides them, we cling to what is perishable and we shall perish along with it all.

Moses and Jesus confront a lack of faith today.

Moses and Jesus along with Elijah last week
tease us with food.

Gandhi once said:

"With so much hunger in this world,
can God come in any form except bread?"

It is time now to be fed at Wisdom's table,
to examine the signs and wonders that are all around us,
to quietly ask ourselves

what it is we really need and who it is we are becoming;
to recall that manna evaporated in the heat of day,
and ponder the presence of Jesus
who comes with food that will not perish.

Whether it is manna shared in the desert
or barley loaves on a grassy hillside overlooking the Sea,
those who eat together are bonded together.

What we shall come to understand in the weeks to come is that it is Christ who eats with us not only as the one who provides,

but also as the food that is provided.

Be attentive now to the Word of God.

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19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/10/2003

1 Kings 19:4-8 + Ephesians 4:30-5:2 + John 6:41-51

Fr. Boyer

Ahab was the King of Israel: his wife, Jezebel was a princess from Tyre and Sidon. A prenuptial agreement allowed that she continues the worship of her god; and she was enthused to convert her subjects. To accomplish that, she banished the prophets of Israel and brought in her own. Elijah has confronted those imported prophets, and in conflict, they are slaughtered. So he is in big trouble with the queen and no one is defending him. He heads to the desert convinced that he is finished, and not just a little discouraged with the God he has defended who now seems to have left him vulnerable and defenseless.

As we sit with the Word of God today, there are many images that sweep over us: especially since last week Exodus put before us the story of a provident God who ignores our murmuring and our hoarding of what perishes only to feed us with a food that lasts forever given at the hands of his own son. Finally at the end of his road, with his own ideas and plans in shambles, Elijah allows himself to be led and fed by God. He becomes strong and perseveres to do even greater things, and at the end of his journey (because he finishes it), he meets God.

The experience of Elijah is the story of anyone who walks through this life doing their best to be faithful to God and do what is right.

The inevitable consequence of that kind of life is clear.

You end up under the "broom tree" wishing it were all over.

It is the faithful ones who do what is right who lose their jobs,
who find themselves alone without a spouse when divorce or death leaves them alone.

It is the faithful ones who find cancer in their body or lose a child or have their homes destroyed by storm of fire.

It is the faithful who face defeat and find their friends too ashamed or too busy to stand by them and hold them up.

But it is to those faithful ones, the believers, that God still sends an angel. John suggests that the angel is Jesus

who comes and says, "Take and eat."

It is the food that sustains the discouraged and restores the faithful.

With that food, Elijah makes it to Sinai where he meets God.

With that food we who make our way toward God are sustained, strengthened, and nourished, and best of all,

we no longer journey alone for our food is our companion,
our food is our God.

The mystery of it all is that in the eating of this food we are at journey's end. It is not miracles that sustain us, but the Word of God, the promises of God, the faith of the Church, and the discovery that we are not alone. God indeed is with us.

Full-bellied crowds, staring at their toothpicks,
idly asking Jesus for some sign
that would validate his claims to be the Bread of Life

dismiss both Jesus and his teaching because
they thought they knew him.

In their unteachable, unreachable state,
they could not recognize, appreciate, or be nourished by the Bread of Life. Faith in Jesus is not simply a
human choice

but a unique cooperation of divine initiative and human free will.

Those who refused to come to faith in Jesus
were refusing the promptings of God.

Faith requires that the believer look beyond the bread
to see Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Listen today to the Word of God like never before.

When you hear of Elijah's discouragement, remember your own.

When you hear of his pain, recognize your pain.

When you hear the angel speak, hear the voice of God.

When you think you can't go another day or take another step,
remember the Words of Jesus and the Promise of God.

We have food here come down from heaven, Jesus Christ
who feeds those who hunger with the bread of his teaching and the bread of his very self in the
Eucharist.

This is the food that prompts our faith and empowers our service.

This is the food that enables us to follow the way of love
proposed to us in Ephesians.

This is the food for all our life's journey.

Feast now on the Word of God:

as the angel says:

"Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you."

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Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
8/15/2003

Revelation 11:19-12:6 + 1 Corinthians 15:20-27 + Luke 1:39-56

Fr. Boyer

The people who gather on this day
in churches throughout this land
are a people pregnant with God.

Count yourself among them.

We are a people filled with life, possibility, and promise.

God is acting and living in us.

God is anxious and ready to break out
and declare that the Kingdom has come.

Now is the time.

We are also a people who feel empty sometimes,
who know bitterness, aching and longing.

There are days when we barely feel God within us,
and times when we must simply take it on faith
that there really is life and wholeness and forgiveness.

Yet today we remember that God has chosen us,

sealed us with the sign of the cross and so we are joined to God forever.

Hope, Healing, Service, Forgiveness, Acceptance
are ours to give and more besides,
because these things have been given to us.

We call this day "Assumption."

We reflect on Mary, the Mother of God,

the one the Church has since the fourth century called: "Theotokos."

"God bearer."

The people who gather on this day
in the churches throughout this land
know also that this day is about them.

For they too are, by her grace, and her acceptance, "God-bearers."

If we do not become so, the work of God will have ceased,
and the Kingdom shall never come.

This day unites us to heaven, to heaven's work, and to heaven's queen.

This day we rejoice and are blessed.

For those who gather in this church today
remember that God has done great things for them,
and Holy is God's Name.

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20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/17/2003

Proverbs 9:1-6 + Ephesians 5:15-20 + John 6:51-58

Fr. Boyer

If you are visiting us or have been away for more than three weeks, what is now happening may catch you off guard and for a moment make you uneasy and uncertain, wondering if I am mixed up or simply do not know how the sequence of things is supposed to go.

For the five weeks we hear the sixth chapter of John's Gospel

I have proposed that we consider the Word of God a "Feast" in itself, and savor every course of the meal with very quiet reflections.

To help with that, especially because the first Old Testament text is so unfamiliar, I am preaching first to provide you some thoughts with which to savor and enjoy the rich fare we are given these five summer weeks.

The first Old Testament text today is from Proverbs.

We do not often hear this marvelous piece proclaimed at Liturgy.

Today we will hear half of an extended reflection on Wisdom.

If at home you read just a little further on, you will hear the other part. The two pieces are a comparison of Wisdom and Folly.

Both are personified as women: one a great lady, the other a woman of the street. Each has built a house, prepared a banquet and sent invitations to guests who are urged to come and feast.

Both invitations are ironically similar.

However, Wisdom's banquet of dressed meat and mixed wines will result in life for those share them while those who accept Folly's invitation will be fed only on stolen bread and water and will wind up in the depths of the nether world.

And there you see the point and get the lesson.

Those who seek wisdom find life.

Those content with silliness and folly welcome death.

These are the radical alternatives the Word of God puts before us, and as we hear in another place, we are urged to "seek wisdom" and "choose life."

Once we have been prepared by the Old Testament texts, we hear an Ephesians text that leads us to root our reflection in the context of the Eucharist, and then comes one of the seven great "I AM" passages of John's Gospel.

Hear it with all the power and awesome mystery of the voice in the burning bush. John wanted to do that.

Yet, there is a very obvious shift happening in this chapter at this point. The verses in the previous three weeks have been concerned with identity. "Who is this man?"

Now it becomes a matter of:

"What is this man?"

And will be settled with his first spoken words in today's text.

Now there is a change in tone and somewhat different language.

The emphasis shifts from the identity of the bread of life to the identity of life in the Eucharist.

In other words, now that we know what this is,

what difference does it make?

The radical alternative is put before us.
It is focused on our relationship to Jesus,
and it is a matter of wisdom or foolishness, of life or death.

The foolish quarrel among themselves over words
without asking their meaning.
They want to know "How" instead of "Why".
Listen to them and learn from their folly.
The issue in this text is the presence of Jesus
which is the reason for the meal.
It is ultimately about
the communication of divine sharing and divine self-giving.
It all happens in human terms.
This is simply about God becoming human
and revealing His Presence in human flesh and blood.
This text is about flesh and blood, human flesh and blood, nothing else. There is no mystery, no magic,
no play on words,
just real and true flesh and blood.

The problem for those who quarreled among themselves
is the same problem before us,
believing that our flesh and blood
can really sustain such a gift
that is so far beyond our fondest hopes and greatest needs.

Listen then, and feast on this Word of God,
for that Word has taken flesh
and God is really and truly among us,
never more real than among those who share the feast of this table.
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21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/24/2003

Joshua 24:1,2,15-18 + Ephesians 5:21-32 + John 6:60-69

Fr. Boyer

On this final Sunday with the sixth chapter of John's Gospel we discover what it's all about.

It is not about food.

It is not about bread.

It is not about flesh or blood.

It is about covenant.

Now we can understand why those people listening to Jesus responded as they did: why they walked away returning to their former life, why they shook their heads and murmured, why they found it hard to believe.

Jesus is inviting them into a covenant, an intimate relationship with God that brings them to the edge of decision, and that is exactly where Joshua is in the first reading today.

"Decide today who you will serve." Joshua says to the assembly gathered to renew the covenant. The choice to be in covenant with God means rejecting all other gods. Every alliance must give way. Nothing is more important than serving God.

Those people who walked away did not do so because they did not like the menu at the heavenly banquet.

They returned to their former way because getting to the banquet was going to ask more of them than they were willing to give.

The Sixth Chapter of John's Gospel is about Covenant.

Hear and understand the ancient liturgy we glimpse in the first reading.

The Book of Joshua that relates the gradual conquest of Canaan and the assimilation of those who lived there concludes with the ceremony we hear today.

Those newly joined to the faith of Israel were incorporated in the ceremony we read today while those who have strayed or lost their resolve are invited to renew the covenant God has offered them. But it will require a single minded commitment to the God of this covenant.

This is what Jesus offers in John's sixth chapter. A deliberate faith commitment and a bond of mutual trusting love were required of those who would serve as disciples of Jesus. It does not mean that disciples have an absolute and equivocal grasp of doctrine. It does not mean that all empirical data has been examined and understood. It means that disciples will trust only one to sustain them, to bring them through this life, to provide care and love them.

It means a completely different way of looking at one's self and others.

It means a totally new relationship with all others, a relationship that leads to unity.

To help us grasp this vision of what Jesus intends,

the Church gives us a section of Ephesians:

a section that raises eyebrows today just as the words of Jesus raised them before.

It is a teaching that may well cause some to turn away, many to murmur, and some to say: "This is hard."

When that happens, it is because, just like in the Gospel, listeners don't get the point.

The second reading is about covenant.

It is not about marriage.

Those who think it is about marriage miss the point

just like those who thought talk about flesh and blood was about chewing on meat.

This whole set of readings today,

and this whole series for the last five weeks is about unity.

The Covenant we are offered in Jesus Christ makes us one with Him and each other.

The gift of the covenant of marriage is that two partners become one.

Anything that would destroy unity is to be rejected.

That means domination, paternalism, abuse, --- all destroy unity.

There is no hierarchy in marriage, only equal partners with different gifts and duties.

The partners to this kind of covenant commit themselves to live lives

and nurture a relationship that strives to reflect and cherish the unity

that comes in Christ.

That is why Paul insists that husbands and wives are to be subject one to another

and imitate Christ in their lives together.

Covenant, whether in marriage or our relationship with God

is an invitation to intimacy.

But intimacy is a problem for our age

because we live in a time that is fearful and uncomfortable with intimacy.

To avoid it, the immature escape into sex and pretend that they have found it.

To refuse it some simply turn to themselves and never risk trust with another.

But intimacy is what God desires to have with us,

and the sacrament of this altar is about that intimacy.

It is about getting close, so close that you become part of the other.

A covenant is always sealed and celebrated with a feast.

Savor today the feast of God's Word.

Hear Joshua's choice to serve the Lord,

and his challenge to decide whom we shall serve.

Hear Paul call us to unity as church.

And hear John's Jesus ask us: "Do you also want to leave?"

If you choose to stay,

If you choose this covenant,

If you risk this intimacy with God and unity in this church,

then you must forsake all others,

set aside anything that divides,

and risk losing yourself for the sake of finding Christ the Risen Lord.

This food Jesus gives makes us a sacrament:

a sign that is effective for salvation,

a sign of a promise made and kept for eternal life.

For that gift, where else can we go?

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22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/31/2003

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8 + James 1:17-18,21-27 + Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Fr. Boyer

What we hear today is not so much Jesus speaking to Pharisees as it is the first and second generation church reflecting upon its internal problems. We hear them seeking in their memory of the words of Jesus a resolution that leads them to fidelity, unity, and holiness in the context of Gospel Morality.

Early Christians of gentile background would have not understood Jewish customs and law. Probably some teachers among that early church insisted on continuing the legalism and rituals of Judaism; and into that conflict steps Mark with the authority of Jesus, who is for him the Risen One. Their faith in the Son of Man liberated them from anything that would keep them from the table fellowship.

That was the essential.

So if someone said you may not come to this table because you do not wash your hands exactly as prescribed in the details of the law, that custom had to go.

It is a serious issue that has not been resolved even to this day.

It may not be hand washing that causes dispute over this table and who may come here; but it is always something to do with human behavior. Then it was mostly about washing pots, pans, and hands.

Now it seems to be sexual behavior, and in our recent past it has been a matter of race, language, and ethnic origins that have excluded some from the table.

The point Mark makes is that there is nothing wrong with hand washing, in fact it is probably a good thing for the control of disease,

but it can do nothing to prevent the contamination of human sin.

That contamination is only avoided by sincere soul-searching in the presence of a merciful and forgiving God.

Goodness, uprightness, and lawful behavior begin with being good and loving what is good.

Goodness or "Morality"

come from being personally and profoundly convinced

that goodness and holiness are the only appropriate response

to the God who is goodness personified

and in whose good image we have been made.

Their trouble was simply that they had turned a ritual into a religion. Instead of leading them to purity of heart, it simply gave clean hands.

The point Mark is making is that goodness and morality are not just a matter of keeping the rules.

We run the constant risk of thinking that way.

Without understanding this Markan insight into Gospel Morality,

we begin to think that if no one gets hurt,

or if everyone is doing it, it's just fine.

The consequences of behavior like that are only considered when one gets caught.

Until then there is no thought about whether or not something is right or wrong, or whether or not our behavior has been good or bad.

We are living with those consequences right now with that kind of morality, and it is just as much a problem for us as the hand washing was for those earliest of Christians.

There is just as much immoral behavior in offices and classrooms as there is in bedrooms. We are living these days with the consequences of lies from the White House to classrooms of this city where cheating and dishonesty is now the way to get what you want, and if you don't get caught it's the way to go.

Mark calls all of this thinking into question today. The church formed in the Markan tradition thinks of morality in terms of the good we have failed to do just as much as in terms of what we have done wrong.

Morality is not just avoiding sin.

To be "moral" means to answer the call of God in all we are, in all we say, in all we do.

Morality is concerned not only with what, but also with why and with who.

At the center of our lives,
the difference between right and wrong, good and bad
begins to be perceived by those
who choose to be shaped in the way of God's own image,
who choose to live in the freedom of God's presence,
a people whose lives, like God, are turned to the needs of others
and are then growing in the way of salvation.
Recognizing, affirming, and joyfully living
in the immediate and loving presence of God-incarnate within us
is what makes us good,
and it makes us holy and blameless in God's sight.
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23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/7/2003

Isaiah 35:4-7 + James 2:1-5 + Mark 7:31-37

Fr. Boyer

There is a word used only once in the Jewish scriptures
and once in the Christian scriptures.

We hear it today in Isaiah and in Mark.

With those readings as a pair, we can hardly fail to miss the point.

The word is translated differently in Isaiah and in Mark,
but in the original language, it is the same.

Isaiah says: "then the tongue of the mute will sing."

Mark says: "He spoke plainly."

What we are drawn to see today in our feast upon this Word
has something to do with breaking the silence, and being heard.

The miracle story is not as much about a deaf man
as it is a sign that God's dominion is at hand.

It's not about a deaf man and Jesus.

It is about signs that we belong in the Kingdom of God.

What this Word and the Church does today

is bring us before Jesus

just as the people of the Gospel Story brought that deaf man.

We stand before Christ Jesus deaf and silent.

We do not hear.

We do not hear truthfully, and so our speech is unintelligible
or we do not speak the truth.

Sometimes it is not so much that our ears are closed
as it is the selective attention we have perfected.

Yet in this world there are so many voices and there is so much noise
leaving us overwhelmed and confused.

And in this world there is always the option

of listening to the voice of self-interest;

of hearing what serves our self worth;

and all of that leaves us silent.

Standing before Christ Jesus today, we hear him say: "BE OPEN."

His command speaks more to our mind and heart than to our ears.

Minds closed to the truth of Gospel values

leave us dumb and able speak.

And when we are silent,

the poor and voiceless that grow in numbers around us

have no hope at all.

To minds, lives, and hearts closed to others, Christ says: "BE OPEN.

Speak for the voiceless when they are jobless and homeless,

because voters only vote for what protects themselves.

Speak for the Immigrant who know not the language
that asks for a share in the wealth of the earth.
Speak for honesty and a limit on wealth in a day
when deceit is the standard operating procedure
in business for the sake of profit.
Speak the whole truth about the common good in a day
when half truth is offered by governments
for the sake of private interest.
Speak of the ugliness of war in a day
when it is managed and concealed to look like a game on prime-time TV.

Open to God's voice we can stand before this world
bearing witness to the power, the truth, and the love of that Voice.
If we know the touch of the risen Christ
before whom we stand in this place,
we will confront the growing suffering of humanity
and confront the principalities and powers
that block the Holy Way of God.
Open to God's voice we shall hear hope in desolation.
Open to God's voice we shall hear comfort in sorrow and sadness.
Open to God's voice we shall hear "I Am With You." in fear.
Open to God's voice, we shall know what to say in the face of injustice.

Those who live in the Dominion of God
have new ways of evaluating what is good
and who is important.
Their agenda is Jesus Christ
who made the needs of others his own mission.
His true disciples shall ask for his healing touch today
because they cannot risk being deaf to the overtures of God
who invites us to be open.
No Audio Available

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24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
9/14/2003

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25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/21/2003

Wisdom 2:12,17-20 + James 3:16-4.3 + Mark 9:30-37

Fr. Boyer

There is a reason for Christian people to assemble week after week before an image of Christ crucified.

The earliest of our sisters and brothers did not do so.

They had no need of that image.

They lived with it in their memory of Jesus and their own experience.

They knew nothing of success or greatness.

In fact, to become one with others who followed "The Way" of Jesus meant that they would lose whatever success or greatness they had.

The cross does not appear until much later

when those who followed "The Way"

began to assimilate the trappings and measure greatness by their ability to imitate imperial power. At that point, the cross appears.

They needed it, lest they think that greatness and goodness in God's sight had anything to do with their power,

their accomplishments, and their resources.

And the cross is still there because we need it too,

a constant and in-your-face reminder

that our image of and our definition of greatness

is in constant need of revision in light of what we know to be true from what God has taught us through Jesus Christ.

We come into this place week after week to be reminded that we follow a messiah who suffers instead of producing spectacular victories.

We want divine strength to fix our messy and difficult lives, but what we get is the cross.

We want nations subdued under our feet rather than our own prostrate before the One who is truly just.

Power and might, success and victory are not the ingredients of greatness among those who have taken Jesus Christ as the Way of their lives.

Jesus did not die for the sake of glory.

He did not suffer and accept his defeat

because he thought it would make him successful.

He did it because it was good and right.

The goal was not victory or glory.

It was to make a new and lasting covenant in which sin is forgiven, reconciliation accomplished, and eternal life made available to all.

I believe that he was just as surprised on Easter morning as those guards when the stone rolled away.

He did not suffer to gain heaven, but to be faithful.

His was a life of service and goodness, obedience and fidelity;
and He lived that way because it was the right way
not because he thought it would get him something.
He hung out with people who had nothing to offer him.
Grasping at greatness or serving others
because it will make us great is the wrong path.
It is not the Way of Jesus.

This Gospel proclaimed with Old Testament Wisdom before it
urges us to think again about greatness.
The true disciple of Jesus Christ is not necessarily a "winner",
flawless, or perfect in any way.
The true disciple never thinks that winning is everything,
and true disciples do not define themselves or measure their worth
by what they have accomplished, bought, sold, or saved.
They are not found in the company of people who can do them favors

We sit before the cross again today,
a week after the Feast of the Holy Cross,
and we are both cautioned and comforted by the Word of God:
Cautioned lest we think that greatness has something to do with us,
Comforted lest we forget that the Son of God was alone,
abandoned, rejected, misunderstood,
and used by those who wanted what he could give them,
but wanted nothing to do with him.

Greatness then, in the light of this Gospel may well require that we surrender "greatness" as our
ancestors in faith had to do
in order to do what is good and right.
It may also mean that in the light of this Gospel,
we surrender the comfort of pretending we are not great enough,
and abandon the excuse that we need to have more of anything
before we can really serve and walk in the Way of Jesus.
If we do not embrace this Gospel Wisdom,
then we are doomed to spend all our days
in one great ambitious, competitive,
anxious squabble about who is the greatest.
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76

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/28/2003

Numbers 11:25-29 + James 5:1-6 + Mark 9:38-43,45,47,48

Fr. Boyer

Joshua, prompted by that nameless tattle-tale young man of the first reading is really the center of things today.

He faces a challenge we must all face sooner or later.

And Moses is up for the task.

Joshua doesn't get it, just like John in the Gospel.

What does not fit into his head, into his idea of how things ought to be must be corrected.

So like Joshua running to Moses, John runs to Jesus.

And Jesus, true to his Old Testament roots,

and the Jesus of Mark's Gospel formed in the image of Moses responds with the same challenge.

That "Spirit" which is the presence of God experienced is not contained, controlled or defined by human imposed limits.

It is poured out all over this earth,

and those who have received it are not necessarily those in this church.

The prophetic, if that is what we are, will be the first to recognize that, point to the Spirit, and affirm the truth of that Spirit's presence.

"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets" says Moses to Joshua.

And in Jesus Christ his wish or command has come to pass.

We are, by Baptism, a Prophetic people: a Prophetic Church.

That gift of Prophecy has nothing to do with predicting the future -

that business has nothing to do with true "Prophecy."

That stuff is a foolish distraction and distortion of the prophet's gift and role in the community's life.

The "Prophet" in the midst of a community of believers

is the one who points to the presence of God,

the action of God;

and serves as a reminder in the midst of a community

that it is God who is the source of all things and the center of all.

We are a Prophetic people, a prophetic church.

We do not presume for one moment that we have exclusive possession

of God, or that God has no others besides us

precisely because we are prophetic and can see God elsewhere.

As an Apostolic Church we continue the mission of the apostles

acting in the place of Jesus Christ to reveal

the presence of God in all creation.

We see, acknowledge, and honor the presence of God in the poor;

and our compassion and response to the poor

bears witness to the Spirit they possess and the Spirit that helps us see

in them the truth of God's presence.

It is why our works of Charity, and specifically right now, our commitment to Catholic Charities becomes one measure among others of our gift of prophecy, because the poor are the presence of God, and our ignoring of them ignores God.

The poor, like the sick among us, sometimes in their suffering fail to remember how close they are to God and God to them. Our response, respect, honor, and care bear witness to our prophetic gift. For this reason today, the sick among us will be anointed because they are holy, because in their sickness, they are sacramental signs of God's presence, a God who has identified with the weak, the frail, the suffering, the sick, and those who are avoided and abandoned.

This truth is the heart of the church's teaching about the sick and the poor.

These are not ignored, forgotten, nor avoided by a people who are prophetic.

The prophet who sees the presence of God sees that presence in them and calls and works and cries out for justice, healing, and relief of their suffering.

Those of you who will come forward in a moment are a gift to us:

you are a sacrament,

holy, filled with the Spirit, and precious in God's sight.

Not alone in your suffering and weakness,

God is with you, in you,

breathing the promise of healing in ever-lasting life.

When you wonder "why" you bear this day's suffering,

know that it is to reveal the presence of God among us:

a God who is no stranger to suffering.

Those of us whose sufferings are so few and so little today,

are called by the Word of God

to draw near to the presence of the Holy One in our midst.

With profound respect and honor

just as we cherish the Blessed Sacrament among us,

we must cherish and revere the poor and the sick,

for they too are the presence of God in our midst.

No Audio Available

77
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
10/5/2003

No Audio Available

78

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/12/2003

Wisdom 7: 7-11 + Hebrews 4:12-13 + Mark 10:17-30

Fr. Boyer

The man in this Gospel wants insurance, not assurance.

He wants to do something to guarantee his reward.

The response of Jesus in this poor translation missed the mark.

The scholars insist that what Jesus says is: "You lack one thing."

It is not as though there is a list of things you have to do -
the truth is, there is something you must become.

It is not a matter of doing something.

It is a matter of being something.

The rich young man gets the point, and he goes sadly away.

The challenge of Jesus is finally not a matter of wealth or poverty,
but a matter of confidence and trust,

a matter of priorities and security.

This Gospel text is serious business for you and me.

I can't imagine how this Gospel is heard in the third world,
and I could not begin to think of what someone would hear in these verses
who goes to be hungry tonight.

This Gospel is about us - it is about church-going people,
who, in the sense of being here today, have come running up to Jesus.

Our piety is largely a matter of keeping the rules,

just like the man in the Gospel,

and we most often think of salvation

as being the result of something we do.

Keep the rules: get to heaven.

A hard look at the Gospel of Mark today

does not give us the comfort of that kind of thinking.

We are not going to have a place in the Kingdom of Heaven

because of something we do.

Our place will be there because of something we are,

and no one is closer to the Kingdom of God than a faithful steward.

Stewardship is a life-style, a way of seeing oneself in relationship

to everything else, a way of perceiving what we have what it is for,

and where it came from.

What happens in this Gospel today changes the question.

It is not longer for us a matter of what we must do to be saved.

It is now a matter of what we must become:

radically dependent upon God.

For the disciples of Jesus this is news comes as a surprise.

Always before they thought that they had to do something to be saved.
Jesus puts before them a thoroughly new idea
and proposes a whole new way of living in relation to things and others.
It takes some imagination to get this right, and then some desire.
I have always thought that this is exactly what was lacking in the rich young man: imagination and real desire.
He could not imagine life without his stuff, his property and the prestige it afforded him.
And for all we can tell,
he did not desire what Jesus proposed as necessary:
at least he did not desire it enough to risk what was suggested by Jesus.

Yet, he was good, and Jesus looked on him with love:
details of this Gospel story we cannot ignore.
This is about us, good people loved by God.
It is about our desires, our relationship with all things,
about where we place our trust, and how much we really trust God
to care for us and have a place for us.
It is about assurance for good stewards,
not about insurance for people afraid of losing it all.
and maybe after today, it is about asking the right question:
"What must I be to be saved?"
No Audio Available

79

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/19/2003

Isaiah 53:10-11+ Hebrews 4:14-16 + Mark 10:35-45

Fr. Boyer

Many people read the gospels to ask what would Jesus do.
Many see the gospels as a way to look back in history,
find what Jesus really said and did,
and so renew their commitment as disciples.

But Mark writes to communicate with the future.
His concern is not "what would Jesus do",
but "what will those do who hear the Good News?"

When he wrote this Gospel, James and John are already dead.
Recalling the story of their brash ambition
is not just an excuse for Jesus to teach about greatness.
It is also Mark's method
of drawing us into the mystery of suffering, service, and love.
It is an invitation to wonder
about how these two who could not get it right
who could not stay awake in the Garden of Olives
and ran away from the crucifixion
ever found a place in the New Covenant.

All of Mark's Gospel tells the story of how slow to believe
disciples of Jesus have been.
And why would he tell it that way except to hold our attention
and make certain that we are included.
In story after story when a miracle happens,
Jesus insists that the one who is cured tell no one.
Not until his hour has come, until the passion and death,
is the story to be told
lest anyone think that glory comes anyway
except through obedience, suffering, and service.

There will be no instant miracles bringing the Kingdom of God.
It will not be a matter of privilege,
who you know, or what they can do for you.
Citizenship in the Kingdom of God comes only the hard way;
by faithfulness in love no matter what it costs.

Talk of a "cup" is Covenant Cup.
It has to do with identity and mutual fidelity.
There is no suggestion here that God likes suffering and is its cause.
The proposal made in this Covenant talk
is that we are the cause of the suffering

because of our failure to make Justice and live in peace.
The suffering of Jesus Christ is not because God likes it,
but because of our failure to bring an end to the kind of behavior
that makes anyone who is innocent suffer.
The news here is that God will not shy away from even that behavior,
and that God will still claim as his own people like us,
like James and John.
The Good News is that eventually they got it right,
and so must we.

The future for which Mark writes is now.
Our easy ambitions and a culture of privilege
are challenged by this Gospel.

Those who expect instant success,
and live in a culture of instant pleasure
will be impatient and wander away to seek easy glory that will not last.

The issue is simple and straightforward.
We have to be here for the long haul.
It is fidelity in face of trouble, suffering, and disappointment that matters.

When miracles do not happen and the way seems difficult and painful,
those who do not turn away from a Jesus of suffering
those who do not abandon the covenant of Blood poured out in love
will be those who have their place with the Jesus of Glory.

These are the ones who will, as Isaiah says, "see light in the fullness of days".
No Audio Available

80

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/26/2003

Jeremiah 31:7-9 + Hebrews 5: 1-6 + Mark 10:46-52

Fr. Boyer

It is Jericho; the last stop on the way to Jerusalem.

The journey to Jerusalem started with the cure of blindness at Bethsaida.

In the meantime, Jesus has spoken clearly of what is to come.

Three times he has referred to what is to happen in Jerusalem.

Each time, the disciples, thinking it's all about them, miss the point.

All they can imagine, all they can think about is:

"What's in it for me."

But now, the end is near. Jerusalem is just up and around the last hill.

And there he sits with his cloak spread out.

It is more than a cloak. It is his visible means of support.

Like those who beg today, he has spread his cloak on the ground

and those who would not look the other way when they passed

drop their coins in the cloak.

When his day is finished, he folds it up to collect what he has received.

His name is Bartimaeus.

It means "Son of the unclean."

This is hardly a simple story of miraculous healing.

The story of Bartimaeus is an example of the way faith works.

He sits at the side of the road with his cloak.

His beggar's faith leads him to Jesus. No one takes him there.

He stands in stark contrast

to those who are already with Jesus on the road

but fail to see his real mission.

They could not see

that his mission was one of love and compassion for all.

They want to be selective about who gets to Jesus

because they think it's all about them.

They try to keep Bartimaeus away.

The sense of urgency in Mark's Gospel,

the frantic movement here and there,

the rushing of the crowds and the pace of Jesus moving toward Jerusalem

suddenly stops, and all eyes are on the two of them:

the Son of David, and the Son of the Unclean.

In a gesture that says more by action than by word,

the Son of the Unclean rises up and comes to Jesus.

He throws aside his cloak, his means of support

and probably his only possession.

What a contrast between this man and the rich young man

who passed by Jesus earlier on this journey

unable to sell what he had.

With cloak gone and all it symbolized in terms of security and support, blind Bartimaeus doesn't seem so blind at all.

He can see where to put his trust.

He can see who can answer his needs and will not fail him.

He can see what the other cannot.

Unlike the blind man cured at the beginning of this section, Bartimaeus does not "go home" after his cure.

He follows Jesus on the "Way."

The "Son of the Unclean" becomes a "Son a David."

The barriers that would have kept him begging have fallen.

Those who would have had him be quiet, begin to speak of Courage.

The journey on to Jerusalem picks up the pace again,

with one who knows that discipleship

is found in living out the fate of the Master.

The challenge to follow Jesus is put before us this autumn weekend because we still cling to our cloaks.

Yet we are more like Bartimaeus than James and John of last week.

We know where this is going to end,

and we have heard often enough that the mission of Jesus

is one of love and compassion for all.

The timid and the cautious will let Jesus pass by.

Those coming to faith, even blind faith, will cry out: "Have mercy."

The Gospel gives us hope, and speaks the best words we might ever hear.

"Take Courage. He is calling you."

No Audio Available

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All Souls

11/2/2003

Daniel 12:1-3 + Romans 6:3-9 + John 6:37-40

Fr. Boyer

If we observe All Souls day and only remember those who have died, we accomplish only half of what this feast is about. Prayers that wrap the fond memories of our loved ones are part of this day's tradition. These prayers are not so much an effort to "reduce a sentence" as they are the acknowledgement that these people we love are still alive with God. Their memory brings us closer to God. Solidarity and communion in the Spirit is all part of what we experience today.

Purification is not something left till judgment. It is an ongoing piece of a healthy spiritual life that reflects the desire for and the struggle for holiness and goodness. Purgatory is a life style, not a holding pen. The second part of this day that takes us beyond our prayerful and grateful memories of lives that have gone before us concerns purification: not the purification of others, but the purification of our own lives.

The story of Moses taking off his shoes because the place was holy carries the image beautifully in a way we can understand. People who live by the spirit, deeply rooted in faith, live repentance humbly and consistently aware of their unworthiness. Our struggle with sin, our efforts at conversion, our prayers for forgiveness, are all part of the purification of the human spirit longing to be present to the divine Spirit. This day is also about that purification.

We are here thinking of death in the midst of life, As believers, we are here thinking of life in the midst of death. The sober, but not frightening, reminder this feast provides can wisely lead us further into holiness and grace; bring us a great measure of peace, and bring about forgiveness, given and received. The list of names in this book, and the names we shall speak in this Mass grows longer every year until it shall include our own. A culture that prizes youth or youthfulness above all things

is a culture in denial about death,
and this feast does not permit the denial.

Today we can put aside our pretense
and renew our efforts to prepare and purify our lives
to be worthy of the promise made to us.
Today we can also renew our ties
with those who have gone before us to God.
We pray for them - not because they cannot -
but because we want to pray with them.
We may ask for their forgiveness
for all of things we did not do when we might have;
and in such prayer, we can realize our union with them in God,
in Christ, and in the Spirit.

Then, fresh from this experience,
we might better approach each coming day
as an opportunity to express our love,
to set aside anger in order to be reconciled,
and let others know how much they mean to us.
Each day can be a chance
to visit and care for one another,
and learn patience.
This is Purification: the work of repentance and conversion.
These and so many other words and works
will help us to be less encumbered by regret
when next we celebrate this feast together.
No Audio Available

82
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
11/9/2003

No Audio Available

83
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
11/16/2003

No Audio Available

84
Christ the King
11/23/2003

No Audio Available

85

1st Sunday of Advent

11/30/2003

Jeremiah 33:14-16 + 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 + Luke 21:25-28,34-36

Fr. Boyer

Imagine, if you will, a mine cave in.

In the total darkness, deep in the earth,

a survivor quietly lies in the dampness.

No food. No water. No company. He is the only survivor.

For three days he waits in a small pocket of air in the darkness.

At times he thinks he hears faint sounds that may mean rescue.

But he is never sure.

Above ground family members wait

while rescue workers do their best afraid of what they may find.

Hope drives them on.

And then it happens:

a beam of light shines through into the pocket of air;

a voice speaks through a tiny opening.

The workers find energy renewed.

While lifeless bodies are later brought up to sorrow,

all rejoice that one has been found alive.

This image is our story this season:

a people in darkness who have seen a great light;

a people waiting for the rescue that has come.

We tell it as a reminder that no matter how threatening,

how hopeless, or how dark the situation of our lives may become,

now matter what caves in on us, or how we may feel alone,

our rescue is near,

and our hope is justified by a savior who is worthy of our trust.

Six centuries earlier Jeremiah

planted the seed of that hope in hearts of a people

he described as a remnant.

We know what a remnant is:

something left over, a scrap, a small piece

often useless in itself and by itself.

It serves as an apt image of what we really are

and the wonder of God's love and care for us.

That "remnant" left after the destruction of Jerusalem
was not much.

With no power of their own,

with everything in ruins,

they were "nothing" to anyone ----- except God.

Yet the seeds of Hope planted by the prophet,

bore fruit for those who waited in faith
and they still bear fruit even today.

When we are nothing,
reduced by sin or disaster,
tasting the bitterness of our weakness,
insignificance and powerlessness,
we are still God's own.
God seems to prefer the remnants of this world,
it's scraps, and left overs,
those who alone cannot amount to much.
God seems to prefer seeking and searching for the lost
and the last.

This is our hope today as we step into this season of Joy.
We share the expectation of that miner
knowing that help is always on the way
and that it will come before it is too late.
We shall be lifted up and lifted out,
we shall see the light,
and know the embrace of those who wait for us above.
God keeps the promise.
Our rescue is at hand.
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2nd Sunday of Advent

12/7/2003

Baruch 5: 1-9 + Philippians 1: 4-6 + Luke 3: 1-6

Fr. Boyer

This week and next we shall hear of this one called: "The Baptist."

With great precision, Luke puts him into history - into time:

Tiberius in his fifteenth year, Pilate is in Judea, Herod is in Galilee. It is Roman time.

Annas and Caiaphas are High Priests.

It is also Jewish time.

What Luke reveals is real.

It happens in time.

It is a matter of history.

It is not a matter of the future.

The spirit of anticipation in this season is not about what God is going to do.

It has already happened.

The spirit of anticipation in this season is about what we are going to do because of what has happened.

As we begin again in this season to tell the story of our God,
and refresh our memories of that God's presence and action in our lives, Luke suggests that this man
John is a good model of faith.

His life passes before us like a play in three acts.

In the first, he steps onto the stage of life from the desert
where in trial and danger he has prepared himself and clarified his mission.

He is strange and wild.

He says the same thing over and over:

"Prepare the way of the Lord..... Prepare the way of the Lord.....Prepare the way of the Lord."

And his image of this Lord is wilder than he is.

It is an image of wrath and punishment.

It is an image that probably reflects more of the expectations of the time and these people oppressed by
the Romans than the truth.

The fact that people seemed to rally around
would suggest they liked the idea, the image of wrath.

And as is often the case, it was probably the "wish" of the people -
that God would "give it to them" - those oppressors, those enemies.

Of course, not to us - but to them..... they think.

John keeps saying: Here he comes! Get ready. It's going to be scary!

And who comes? Jesus.

It's as though he suggests "Ivan the terrible" is coming,

and a gentleman with a tennis racket walks on.

Curtain. End of scene one.

John gets over his surprise and goes on with his business: Baptism.

Folks are coming from everywhere to escape the coming wrath.

Just in case it does happen.

Out of the crowd steps Jesus.

John says: "What are you doing here? You should baptize me."

Jesus says: "Let's do it your way."

Curtain, end of scene two.

John is in prison wondering about what got him there and why.

He knows he did everything he was supposed to do, and did it well.

But this Jesus; he doesn't seem to get it right,
so John sends his friends to clear up the matter.

Jesus sends them back filled with sadness that he can't be what John wants him to be, and sad that the ways of God seem strange to this man of God.

True to his own vision, Jesus tells them to report what they have seen - touching deeply in their memories prophetic words and images they know very well about the blind, the deaf, and the poor.

And then he calls after them and adds: "Blessed is the man who is not scandalized by my behavior."
(Don't lose faith and give up because I do not do it your way.)

In the final scene, Jesus turns to those around him revealing the depth of his own emotions and says:
You think he's not a prophet? I tell you, John is the greatest man who ever lived. And yet, the least member of my kingdom is greater."

And the people turn to one another and almost think aloud:

"It is a strange kingdom where the least member is greater than the greatest prophet who ever lived.

It is a strange God who exalts the humble and serves the servant.

It is almost enough to make one humble and make one a servant.

The lights go down, and it's the end of scene three.

The spirit of anticipation in this season is not about what God is going to do.

It has already happened.

The spirit of anticipation in this season is about what we are going to do because of what has happened.

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87

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2003

Genesis 3:9-15,20 + Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr. Boyer

We are tempted to think sometimes that Mary's call was so special that it has nothing to do with us, but to do that reduces her role to little more than a convenient body for the Incarnation.

The consequences of pushing Mary into some semi-divine and barely human existence are disastrous for the Christian message.

Her role goes far beyond

her physical function for the birth of Christ.

She is the one who teaches us by word and deed what we are created for.

She is the one whose desire to do the will of God shows us the perfect life of a disciple.

Luke gives her to us as the perfect disciple who says:

"Let it be done according to your will."

John give her to us as a guide and a teacher who says at Cana:

"Do whatever he tells you"

When a woman ran up to Jesus and said to him:

Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that gave you food, Jesus said on the contrary, that those who do the will of God are the blessed.

If the will of God is Peace, then are peacemakers.

If the will of God is Justice then we will not rest until it is universal.

If the will of God is forgiveness, then we will run to those we have offended to make amends and embrace those

who have offended us without condition or delay.

If the will of God is a generous heart,

we would be stewards of the gifts we have without limit or fear.

If the will of God is that we be servants to one another,

there would be no homelessness no hunger no loneliness.

Those who do the will of God then, are truly blessed.

This feast and the woman who is its focus

affirms the holiness of human life,

its sanctity and its origins in the divine.

This feast and the woman who is its focus

confirms the divine plan and our participation in it.

This feast and the woman who is its focus

reveals the human vocation in holiness.

This feast and the woman we honor this day

gives us reason to remember

that we are here to do the Will of God;

that we are holy and blameless in God's sight,

and that praise of God's glory is our purpose and our vocation.
No Audio Available

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3rd Sunday of Advent

12/14/2003

Zephaniah 3:14-18 + Philippians 4:4-7 + Luke 3:10-18

Fr. Boyer

He's back, the one we heard of last week,
the one who alerts us to the presence of God.
The crowd, anxious to be ready,
wanting to see God,
waiting for God to act
begins to wonder and ask:
"What should we do?"

John was not simply shouting rebukes,
and trying to reduce the crowd to a mob of fear.
His message is one of social responsibility,
and they heard it.
He spoke to the people of his age
and the inequities of his time.
Acts of Justice are what he asks of the people who come for baptism.
Repentance for the baptized means doing justice.
Making the way for God to be among us is a matter of justice.
John speaks to people where they are.
To tax collectors he speaks of the justice they can do.
To soldiers he speaks of the justice they can do.
And there were certainly others from every station in life.
What we probably see here in Luke's Gospel
is that soldiers and tax collectors had already found a place
within the early Christian community.
What John ultimately says to us
is that we shall see the salvation of our God
when people who have give.....

Sophisticated as we have become,
we recognize systemic causes to hunger and poverty
and we know that a coat or meal once in awhile is inadequate.
Patterns of family violence and poor parenting
repeat in new generations.
We think we shall fix all this by ending welfare
as a way of stopping dependency.
And the result ends the opportunity of a single mom
to pursue four-year education and develop the earning power
that leads to independence.

Cities tear down decaying housing projects
without getting builders to invest in enough new
subsidized housing units, leaving poor people without affordable apartments.

Justice does not come from politics or from law.
It comes from the heart,
and those whose hearts are prepared
ask the question: "What shall we do?"

In the meantime, John still speaks of Justice.
He speaks to Walmart who hires and hides illegal aliens, demands that people clock out and keep working, provides no benefits by not allowing workers the hours to earn them.
He speaks to Corporate executives who give themselves a bonus the day they lay off workers;
to executives who raid pension plans to subsidize their ambitions,
and keep some transactions off the company books.

In the meantime, John still speaks of Justice.
He speaks to people in power insisting that they not bully,
make false accusations,
intimidate others or use violence for any end.
In doing so, he is speaking of domestic violence and abuse.
He speaks of anger and hostility that springs out of stress
and makes the innocent and vulnerable the target of anger.

This Third Sunday of Advent prompts us to wonder and ask:
"What shall we do to see the salvation of our God?"
The answer comes from the mouth of the prophet;
the who knows, and points the way: GIVE.
Not because it's Christmas, but because it is "THE WAY."
Give because it is Just, because it is Right,
and because it is our duty.
The Justice John speaks of does not come from left-overs,
spare change, nor from guilt;
it comes from repentance and a change in life,
a change in values, and a change in focus.
It is rooted in a spirituality that is free of fear and anxiety,
free of selfishness and guilt.
It is a spirituality alive with love and gratitude,
and it is the only possible way for us to be ready for the coming of our God.
No Audio Available

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4th Sunday of Advent

12/21/2003

Micah 5:1-4 + Hebrews 10:5-10 + Luke 1:39-45

Fr. Boyer

The old and young come together today
in this wonderful Gospel story.

We call it, "The Visitation."

If we stop short of reaching into all of its mystery,
we would think it is about two cousins
surprised by God,
bound together by a wonder greater than family.

The one with the leaping womb
is filled with the restlessness of God.

The one who makes the journey
is filled with a God seeks the barren.

Surprised by life, they embrace to lead us deeper into this wonder.

It is not about them: two women who visit.

It is about God who visits His people.

It is about a God who comes
to embrace the barren, the old, the hopeless.

It is about God who surprises those who have given up;
God who laughs at nature and does what we cannot imagine;
God who fulfills the desires of those
who rise above fear and doubt to risk what he asks of us.

The Gospel we proclaim today and again later this week
is the Good News of a promise kept, desire fulfilled, hope rewarded by a visit and an embrace.

God is with us.

God has come to stay with us.

God is the reason for our joy, our laughter, and our song.

No Audio Available

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Christmas

12/25/2003

Fr. Boyer

God has broken the silence that settled on the earth after the goodness of creation was spoiled by human pride

and freedom was seized for self service.

A long night of darkness settled on creation with sin;

but with the coming of Light from Light, True God from True God, that long night of sin is at an end.

"I am the Light of the World." he says in the midst of darkness,

and then at the third hour when darkness seemed to settle over everything smothering all hope, there was a loud cry, and the silence was broken.

God had entered human history to face its fear and its pain.

A gracious presence sets us free

from the past of darkness, sin and silence.

That past, for all of us, cannot be undone;

but the meaning of the past

can be defined by what we do in the present,

and the way we choose to live the future.

In some wonderful way, that is what we celebrate today:

the past, the present, and the future.

Our telling of the Bethlehem story could easily become

a way of just remembering the past - God's past.

Yet to do that is to step out of the story.

The journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem happened at a particular moment of time, Quirinius was governor of Syria.

But this is not the only journey.

We are going to Bethlehem,

making a journey like them in faith, uncertain of the future,

but confident from the past that the final word of this story will be one of light shining in darkness and life triumphant over death.

But God too makes a journey to Bethlehem.

From a history of darkness and silence, God comes to Bethlehem.

From a history of infidelity, God comes into an uncertain future.

Now silent no longer, using no prophets or angels to speak for Him, God speaks. Into the darkness comes the Light.

We are the ones, God seeks and we gather in this holy place,

our Bethlehem, that we may see and hear God's voice at long last.

We are not here to be entertained by children

or briefly moved by sentimental carols.

We are here to celebrate the truth

that our God is not hidden in heaven,

that our God is not silent any longer,

and that the darkness of this night in a terror ridden world

will not last.

God did not enter human history to bring us a set of guarantees about the future.

God came to liberate us from a paralysis of the past but only if we have the confidence necessary to be liberated.

God did not enter human history to solve our problems or cure our complaints, aches and pains.

On the contrary, God entered human history to experience all of that with us and show us the way to rise.

God did not come to make peace, but to show us how to achieve it by forgiveness if we have the confidence necessary to desire peace.

A spiral of violence marks our past. Suicide bombings, military assaults that destroy homes and families feed the flames of hatred the consumes another generation of terrorists.

The story of Bethlehem points to another strategy of hope

that does not rely on power or weapons, but upon the deepest instinct of the human heart.

It is a long way to Bethlehem, and it seems very dark.

Instead of God's voice, we hear bombs and the cries of the innocent.

But the human heart when purged of anger and resentment knows the way.

In Bethlehem it is a baby - vulnerable, simple, trusting.

It is a baby that brings thoughts of peace, simple joy, and dreams of a future.

What is born in Bethlehem is not only the divine into the human;

but also in Bethlehem is the human is born into the divine.

In that birth comes our future filled with a gracious God who stirs anew the deepest longings and desires of the human heart.

Our past does not bind us.

We may give it new meaning by what we do in the present and what we choose to do in the future.

The silence is broken.

The dawn comes, and this night of sin in which we live is over.

Our first glimpse of this God for whom we have waited,

this God who has come for us is a baby.

Now the past is no more.

Now there is only the future and what we shall choose to do.

No Audio Available

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Holy Family
12/28/2003

Sirach 3:2-7,12-14 + Colossians 3:12-21 + Luke 2:41-52

Fr. Boyer

This story, in spite of its emotional appeal
is more about theology than emotions.
In Luke's Gospel, this is the first time Jesus speaks.
What we hear today are his first words,
and it is important when reading Luke
to pay attention to where things happen.
If he provides the detail of a location, it matters.

Luke is taking great care
to shape the early identity of Jesus as a true Israelite,
raised from birth in the cherished traditions of his people.
He was formed in faith at home, at synagogue and in the temple.
Nothing about the Gospel gives us reason to think
he was ever a child prodigy of a messiah.
What we see here is youthful stirrings of his awareness
about a place in God's plan;
but it would be years before anything comes of it.
During that time, we get from these verses
a sense of how and where he grew into the man he became.
It all happened in a home, in the relationship of a family,
a family that kept alive and observed their religious traditions
and it happened in synagogue, and at the temple.

The nesting ground for anyone
who would seek their place in God's plan is the same.
The relationship that disposes Jesus for his relationship with God
is the one he shares at home with Mary and Joseph
in the context of their lived faith.
It can hardly be any different for us.
A people seeking their place in God's plan
will find it at home, in the synagogue and the temple.

The Home is where it begins - in a relationship of love, acceptance, forgiveness, service, and care.
Then it is nurtured and formed
by education, information, and opportunities for service.
That's what the synagogue was - the "School of the Covenant".
It was and still is the larger family
that reinforces what happens at home
and provides formation from the Word of God
and the support of prayer.
Then, what is born in the home
knows the formation and nurturing of education

is celebrated in the "temple" of the Church
where the community bears witness to that faith,
rejoicing, giving thanks, and observing those cherished traditions
that reinforce identity and root one in the plan of God.

There may be other ways to find the truth of one's identity
and grow into one's place in God's plan;
but what Luke puts before us today
speaks to parents and to children
from the richness and the power of God's Word.
Luke begins his Gospel in the temple and it ends there.
It is a Gospel of Obedience,
and the Jesus of his Gospel seeks God's Will.
The first words of Jesus spoken in Luke's Gospel
are about seeking and doing the Will of God.
Luke's Christmas proposal to us
is that learning to seek and do God's will
is a project of life that in Christian terms
involves family, religious education, and the sacred liturgy.

When you stop to think about it,
walking from Nazareth to Jerusalem was not very convenient.
But then "convenience" is not what rules the lives of people
who seek God and want to do God's will.
We are in the right place today.
It is not only a matter of finding a home in the church,
but also a matter of God's Word finding a home in us.
In as much as it does, we have then become
chosen, beloved, and made holy by God;
and all our works will be done in the name of Jesus
as we give thanks to God through him.

We will gather again for Holy Day this week.
It may not be convenient, these Holy Days rarely are;
but it will be part of our identity,
but the frequency of our assembly is how the Word of God
takes root in our lives.
No Audio Available

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Mary, Mother of God

1/1/2004

Numbers 6:22-27 + Galatians 4:4-7 + Luke 2: 16-21

Fr. Boyer

It's all about names today.

The ancient writer from the Torah
in the last verse of today's reading
shows the importance of God's name
when with great eloquence
bestows the blessing upon Israel.

Having God's name on them
means that Israel receives God's blessing.

Then again in the Letter to the Galatians,
the whole idea of adoption implies the sharing of the parental name.
By virtue of the Spirit's indwelling in the believer's heart,
the Christian is marked by God's name.

That name spoken now in the Gospel of Luke is the Good News.

Just as the divine name was revealed to Moses,
we have it revealed to us.

Speaking that name, God's face was uncovered,
and the Lord entered a covenant with the people of Israel
and gave them the law.

With that name, and by its power,
they were on their way to Canaan.
with that name, they blessed themselves with its power.

The good name remains for us
the gift by which God is lovingly identified to us
and offers us salvation.

In it we find peace.

In it we are made children and heirs of God.

It is God's great and last word of salvation.

At that circumcision, the covenant it symbolized was complete.

What was begun with Abraham is finally consummated.

Given the name "Jesus" which means, "God Saves"
the abundance and fullness of God's gracious love is declared
by all who speak that name.

"Jesus" is the song of angels, the treasure of Mary,
the wonder of shepherds.

For us he is delight and joy.

Our failures, our broken ornaments, the discarded wrappings
of Christmas gifts matter not in the face of the divine presence.

As I said last week to you all:
God has broken the silence.
The final word has been spoken.
He is our blessing and our redemption.
We begin this new year of grace and faith by speaking that name
in prayer, in thanksgiving, in praise, and in hope.
We gather at this table
for the first celebration
in the fourth year of the third millennium.
We treasure in our hearts
this great and gracious redemption we have,
for God saves now, today
and all through this new year and ever year for ever and ever, Amen.
No Audio Available

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Baptism of the Lord

1/11/2004

Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7 + Acts 10:34-38 + Luke 3:15-16,21-22

Fr. Boyer

Of all the feasts of the year,
this one has lead me deeper into the mystery of Christ Jesus
than any other.

It is full of profound truth about God, about Jesus Christ,
and about any of us who are Baptized into divine life.

I believe that his baptism was the central moment
in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

When Jesus stepped forward to be baptized,
he affirmed his solidarity with us, who are sinners,
in a public way.

By that action, he revealed to us how intimately
God wishes to be in solidarity with us - with sinners.

Jesus stood in the water of the Jordan

just as he lay in a stable

and grew up in a home with Joseph and Mary.

He knew human weakness.

He worked for a living.

He made friends and enemies.

Desiring to be one with us so completely,
he took his turn joining the self-admitted sinners at the Jordan.

He identified with every single aspect of the human condition.

He stood with those who responded to John's call,

solid in his support and caring for those who would repent.

Eventually his identification with us would lead him to death.

As we shall see in this year with Luke's Gospel,
the evidence of his desire to be with us is overwhelming.

While most people would avoid the possessed, lepers, paralytics,
enemy soldiers, and the dead;

Jesus reached out and touched them.

While the righteous would avoid sinners and beggars,
prostitutes and tax collectors, Jesus made them welcome
and his acceptance revealed God's forgiveness and healing love.

Yet this issue of identity does not stop in that direction with Jesus.

It is also a matter of our identity with Him,

and this is where the Gospel today offers us strength and courage.

Our solidarity with Christ Jesus, which begins at Baptism
involves more than the acceptance of others without exception.

It also means sharing in his baptism - - -

his suffering and death.
It is a baptism that is unappealing and overwhelming,
but there was something that happened to Jesus at the Jordan
that makes it all possible.

He came that day to understand that he was
"THE BELOVED OF GOD".
He came to understand that others might leave him,
but God would never leave him.
That voice he heard - wrapped him in divine love.
His strength and his hope were found in that identity.
He was loved by God!

That same gift is given to each of us who are baptized
into His dying and rising.
We are loved by God.
No matter what happens, God does not stop loving us.
No matter what we do or where we go, God does not leave.
We have the same Spirit that possessed, inspired,
and sustained Jesus Christ.
We have been welcomed as children of God,
and we have been proclaimed "Beloved."
When we face the struggles that are a part of our solidarity
with each other and with Jesus Christ,
we must remember and repeat the blessing:
"I am beloved of God."
Then we, too, can live in the hope found in that identity.
No Audio Available

Isaiah 62:1-5 + 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 + John 2:1-11

Fr. Boyer

Today as always, the Gospel proclaimed reveals something about God, about Christ Jesus, and about us.

Since I have been with you, I have been trying to teach you to look into the first reading for clues about how to understand the Gospel text.

Doing that again today, we can hardly miss the message that Israel's God was not content to participate in a relationship based only upon Creator and Creature.

There's was a God who invited creatures to become partners in a covenant.

It was a covenant different from all others.

It was not political for the sake of peace.

It was not a treaty for commerce.

It was not even a covenant of friendship.

It was to be the covenant of a spouse - the two should become one.

This was to be a covenant expressed in the language of love:

"I will be yours, you will be mine."

"What is mine is yours, and what is yours will be mine."

With that background,

the details of John's Wedding Feast Story are not so important.

The place, the number of jugs, the guest list, wine quality, or the placement of the text in John's Gospel

is not the primary issue nor the first message we share today.

If we were making a movie or painting a picture

perhaps those details would be important,

but not here and not now.

Canana sets the scene for us to imagine God's great passion for human kind.

It tells us about a God who wishes to be with us like a husband with a wife or like a wife for her husband.

In as much as Jesus Christ is the flesh and blood revelation of that God, he comes to us as a bridegroom.

What we celebrate here is truly a wedding feast,

not one from the past, but one for today.

The bride and the groom of John's Gospel have no names, for this is not about them, it's about us.

This Good News we proclaim this day and every year after the Baptism of the Lord is that God has come to us like a spouse to be with us and to take us as His own forever.

But this Gospel also reveals something about us.

Our wine has run out.

We are a people without a future, without hope, without joy until we invite Jesus Christ to be our guest

and until we follow the instructions of his mother:

"Do whatever he asks you."

For those who will, there will be a feast that lasts forever.

For those who will, there will be no future without joy and without abundance.

The days in which we live give more than convincing evidence that our wine is out.

War, violence, poverty, consumerism, selfishness, infidelity,

treating the gift of human life as though it were a disposable mass of tissue,

abandoning our elders when they can no longer produce for us or entertain us,

un-parented children violent, disrespectful, and helpless,

half-empty churches, and the richest nation on earth cutting assistance to the poor and leaving millions

without health care while it fires million dollar missiles in the desert all says one thing: our wine has run out.

This is not a nice, cozy, romantic story about saving the day at Cana for a nice young couple.

This is about a God looking for a partner for life:

about a God who wants to reveal his endless mercy and abundant gifts in a most extravagant way.

This gospel proclaimed in this place

raises the question about who may be God's partner;

who might be able to extend God's generous gifts

by their own generosity and stewardship,

who might put into action

God's forgiveness waiting to be given,

God's mercy, and patience, waiting to be shared?

Who will do that and when?

Who will enter into this covenant with God

and finally treat God's gift of life

for what it is, the first sacrament of God's presence in this world?

Saying "Yes" to God who proposes a covenant like marriage to us means saying "No" to some other thing and lesser gods.

Taking communion in this church is our entry into that covenant.

It is no private matter between God and us.

We do not step forward because we're at the end of the pew,

we are afraid what others might think, or because we feel good about it.

We say "Amen" to this covenant of grace in the most public way possible,

and we become one with our God in the most intimate way possible

so that God's presence in this world will be real, as real as we are.

Today we know that our wine has run out,

and that until Jesus Christ into our lives,

we are left with the cheap wine or just jars or water.

No Audio Available

Nehemiah 8:2-4,5-6,8-10 + 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 Luke 1:1-4,14-21

Fr. Boyer

Two weeks ago we were given an intimate look into the experience of Jesus at his Baptism.

We heard what he came to understand about himself, and Luke revealed to us in those verses

the source of power, courage, and fidelity that motivated Jesus, provided his sense of himself and his relationship with God.

Today we move a little further into the mystery of Jesus Christ,

and Luke takes us to his home town where we see something the habits that were part of his life, and how his life there shaped his future and his ministry.

Luke tells us that Jesus was accustomed to go to the synagogue; that it was his habit.

We further discover that it was there that he came to sharpen his focus and understand his purpose in life, his ministry, and in a sense, his vocation.

In the grand scope of Luke's writing, there develops a parallel focus in which he reveals something about Jesus

in order to reveal something about the church as the community of believers.

What he says in the first part of his work, which we call "The Gospel" he says again in the second part of his work, which we call, "Acts of the Apostles."

When we look at the whole work, what he says of Jesus he is saying of the community of believers.

What he tells us about the church he first establishes in Jesus.

In other words, if Jesus did it, so does the church.

If the church does it, it is because Jesus did it.

So today, when hear Jesus put forth his agenda, it is the agenda of the church.

In both volumes, Luke puts heavy emphasis upon the Spirit.

The work of Jesus begins with the descent of the Holy Spirit at his Baptism.

The work of the Church begins with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. First the Spirit guides and empowers Jesus,

and then directs and empowers the church.

What we must not fail to see and understand is that the work of Jesus is not simply "spiritual", and it is not just for sometime in the future.

What he does is for the present, and what he comes to do is for now.

The liberation and the setting free he came to accomplish was for more than in the future in the Kingdom of God.

Those he touched did not have to wait till heaven before they could see, hear, walk, or be clean.

Those who came in faith were saved by that faith, not later, not in heaven, but right then;

and their joy, their praise, and their thanksgiving didn't have to wait either.

The agenda of Jesus was the whole person,

and the liberty and release he came to accomplish came to mean the forgiveness of sin and all its consequences and manifestations. So if he came to confront the sin of injustice, then the consequences of that injustice were eliminated, all of them. If he came to release those who were held bound, then everything that held them had to go. Luke makes it clear that this ministry of Salvation effected the liberation of the whole person, body and soul, mind and spirit. If it were so for Jesus, then it must be so for us as well. Sharing in the same Spirit by the will of Father, we share the same agenda. We, the liberated become the liberators. We who are saved share the message of salvation for all. We the forgiven share forgiveness. Just as we have been gathered into this wonderful experience of Jesus Christ, so shall we gather all with the same inclusive and all embracing love. What we proclaim and what we do because of our Pentecostal understanding of our selves will also be the same: affecting the whole person, body and soul, mind and spirit. Our mission in the same spirit as the mission of Christ will be liberty and release. The forgiveness of sin that is ours to proclaim and accomplish will bring an end to all the manifestations of that sin and its consequences or it will not be forgiveness at all. What we become and how we live because of the Spirit's power in our lives is for now and for today, not for sometime off in the future, in far-off "heaven." And so we confront injustice and we make it change first in our own lives, and then we change our systems and our ways of doing things and seeing things that result in injustice. We see the poor and the hungry, and we do not say: "You'll have enough to eat in the Kingdom of God: because Jesus said: "Feed them yourselves." The pity with which Jesus looked upon the crowds and the mercy that he showed them is the same pity with which we must look upon the crowds of hungry and homeless; and the mercy God extends to them comes from our own hands and out of our own lives, or there is no mercy at all. What we hear spoken in the synagogue must be what we say in this church. The habit of Jesus must be the habit of those who would follow him. If he was in the habit of going to synagogue, and there perceived through the Word of God what his life was to be about, it is the same for us. His habits must become our habits. The places where he found his identity and the vision of his live must become ours: in Baptism and in the Spirit. Try out the words of the prophet on yourself, try out the role of one who is beloved by God, chosen as his own, and sent to proclaim liberty and release, salvation, forgiveness, and love. For that is what we are and it is what we become in this place. The agenda of Jesus is the same for everyone of us. No Audio Available

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4th Sunday in Ordinary Time
2/1/2004

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5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/8/2004

Isaiah 6:1-8 + 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 + Luke 5:1-11

Fr. Boyer

There is no doubt after hearing the reading from Isaiah before this Gospel that the Church will assemble today to reflect upon its call.

Paul reinforces the same theme as he summarizes his teaching and his own calling.

Peter is the focus, his call, his response, and his mission.

What we must remember is that Luke's use of Peter is not historical or personal; but rather theological and collective.

What Luke means when he says something of "Peter" he is saying of the Church.

Consequently, there is sitting back and listening to this Gospel

as though it was about someone else at some other time.

It's about us: our call, our response, and our mission.

What we come to understand from the Word we share today is what kind of people are called by God to complete the work of Jesus and in the sharing of tradition reveal the saving plan of God.

We do not read of saints or scholars today.

It is a man of unclean lips, one who has persecuted the church, and a sinful fisherman who are called.

What we also come to understand from the Word we share today is that the call itself comes in the normal circumstances of everyday life.

Isaiah was in the Temple, not an unusual place to find a pious Israelite.

Paul was running around in the fast lane as he always did.

Peter was fishing.

These people are inspired in ordinary places doing ordinary things.

What is out of the ordinary is what they experience in those ordinary events, and Luke proposes that we might pay attention.

We have put ourselves in this church today because we have been called, because we have received a tradition to share and because the work of Jesus Christ is not yet complete.

The world in which we live is not the Kingdom of God.

It is barely a human place to live some of the time,

and at best, we see the Kingdom of God dimly as though through a veil, but we do see it and know its coming none the less.

What we have come to understand through our tradition and in this place is that the further in-breaking of that Kingdom and its eventual triumph will depend upon our response to the call that has brought us here.

For most of us, it is not a very dramatic call.

It may simply be the call to be a parent.

To shape the mind and the heart of child in the ways of Jesus Christ.

It may be simply to be a teacher, a catechists, a priest, deacon, or sister,

who is willing and ready to extend their everyday lives, like Peter.
Called to do something illogical, like throwing the nets out once more
after a long night of fishing without a catch.
They were tired, getting the nets wet once again meant more heavy work;
but they did it anyway, and what they discovered was more than net full of fish.
The risk is that we might overlook the action of God,
that we may think that someone else may do what we have been called to do,
or that somehow the Kingdom is just going to happen by a miracle.
Luke would have us understand that fish got in that net
because Peter and his companions put out the net again when Jesus asked them.
The people of Corinth still preach the timeless Gospel to us today
because Paul preached it to them.
Israel drew near to the Lord because Isaiah was heard that voice in the Temple.
All of them rose up from their sinfulness because they did not fail to see and to hear the action and
word of God in their midst.

Like Isaiah, today we are in the Temple.
Like Paul, many are in the fast lane, in the middle of city life, rushing here and there to make a name for
themselves.
Like Peter, some of us have been in the boat a long time, and we get tired.
Yet we have inherited a tradition that must be handed on if we are to live.
It is a tradition filled with promise and hope.
It is a tradition of Justice and of Peace.
It is a tradition of Forgiveness, tolerance, kindness and mercy.

If you listen very carefully, you will still hear the question:

"Who will I send?"

If you look very carefully, you will perceive who is in this boat with us,
and what he asks of us.

"And Jesus said to them: "Do not be afraid.....and they left everything and followed him."

No Audio Available

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6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/15/2004

Jeremiah 17:5-8 + 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-22 + Luke 6:17,20-26

Fr. Boyer

The earliest followers of Jesus were surely poor, powerless, marginal and socially irregular.

They were like him, and had the most interest in what he had to say.

By the time Luke's gospel is written, there are others.

Most scholars hold the opinion

that this Gospel was written for a very different kind of people:

respectable people of influence and means.

They were an advantaged group conscious of the power and their prestige.

There is a decided difference between Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount" and these "Beatitudes" of Luke.

Matthew spiritualizes his. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." he says.

There is nothing spiritualized, internalized or removed for Luke.

He simply says: "Blessed are the poor."

No words of warning or woe in Matthew.

No lack of them in Luke.

The future of those who seem to have no future is assured.

The rest would be advised to discern that this is the way it works with God.

Luke does not give suggestions about how to be happy.

Woes are directed toward the privileged, the well-fed, the rich, the carefree precisely because their condition, and status is used to exclude others, keeping them silent, invisible, powerless and marginal.

The Jesus of Luke knows that among people of status, power becomes power to abuse.

This is tough news for us,

and there is no way to stand here and coat it with sugar.

People who seem to have everything going for them live in great peril.

Security blinds people to the need of surrender and letting go

to make room for the ever-surprising presence and action of God.

We are the rich and we are the powerful.

Even though many are burdened with debt, it happens because we have credit, and credit allows us to buy more and more.

There are some who do not even have the power of plastic.

The culture of the consumer and the power of the borrower continues to neglect the really "dirt poor" among us,

keeps them silent and invisible.

The power of the consumer society criminalizes the hungry and the minority who look for a share in the "good life."

The Jesus of Luke's Gospel assures those who seem to have no future

that they do in fact have one that is better;
while that same Jesus assures those who think they have it made
that a surprise is on the way.
Guilty feelings in the face of this Gospel is not what is called for.
Feeling the plight of the homeless as a moral dilemma is not enough either.
The failure arises
from the institutions on which our common life and its quality depends.
Election year promises of new jobs from politicians offer nothing
when one considers that the majority of those jobs are part-time, unskilled,
low paying ones in the service sector
that will not put food on a table under a roof.
In a nation that watches that rich get richer
and the poor grow in more desperate numbers, this Gospel is serious business.
It confronts us with the difficulty
of being a good person in the absence of a good society.

I would propose that the Beatitudes
offer those who would follow Jesus with Luke's Gospel
a kind of "guidance system" to correct
the distortions of attitude, behavior and values of contemporary culture
whether it is the affluent culture of Luke's time or our own.
Luke and the Jesus he proclaims
reverses the assumption that blessedness
lies in riches, pleasure, comfort and happiness,
and asserts that the fulfillment of every need and desire
is found in God and in God's ways.
No Audio Available

99

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/22/2004

1 Samuel 26:2,7-9,12,13,22-23 +1 Corinthians 15:45-49 + Luke 6:27-38

Fr. Boyer

One of the basic assumptions in the economy of the Greek and Roman world was the notion of charis.

There whole world turned on this notion

that charis was kept in constant motion.

They believed that the divine would "grace",

that is to say, provide benefits for humans,

and then the humans would in turn respond, or make eucharistia

by acknowledging such favors through gifts to the temple worship.

Then, these gifts would mean good construction jobs.

Better temples would enhance the "glory" of the divine

which would in turn effect further gifts from the divine to the human.

It was a cycle, a constant round of gift giving and growth.

There was something out there circulating all the time.

No one held on or kept this "charis" as their own

because to do so would stop further gifts from the divine.

All of us from time to time have been invited into "Chain Letters"

for various gifts --- to receive requires that you pass it on,

and the only way the system works is for the "letter" to stay in motion.

If anyone stops or breaks the chain, it's over.

Luke builds his image of grace and his most fundamental moral message on this ancient idea.

It is the end of the old "tit for tat" idea.

It is the beginning of a new age of grace.

It is not a "spiritual" plan, but a way of living in the concrete reality of the present.

What Luke puts before us in this conclusion to the sermon Jesus began last week

is the most radical and clearest expression

of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

It would have been nice and a lot easier if Jesus had just left it at that.

"Love your enemies."

It is a good slogan.

It looks nice framed on the wall.

Luke's Gospel however is not a catalogue of slogans,

it is a way of life - a way of being - a pattern for relationships.

This faith we share is not a list of beliefs about God plus behavior.

We are Christians not because of what we believe,

but because we have been called to be disciples of Jesus.

to become a disciple is not a matter of new or changed self-understanding

but rather to become part of a different community with a different set of practices.

So this Gospel today is just as tough as the one we proclaimed last week.

There are no loopholes to avoid this challenge.

There is no way to make this teaching a "theory" or an "ideal."

There is no way to lift this challenge out of reality

and turn it into a abstract void that would allow us to reason:

"Well, I'll love my enemies but I won't like them!"

That reasoning is evasive.

It is a faceless alibi - an excuse for avoiding what is asked of us.

To keep us from running in that direction,

Jesus closes the door on that thinking with the details of his plan for enemy love.

"Do good to those who hate you."

"Bless them."

"Pray for them."

Yet something in us reasons that Jesus failed to see what was to come.

That evil regimes and terrorist attacks that we have come to know

could never have been in his mind.

We think he never could have imagined the horrors and evils we have seen.

But to think that way is to reveal that we have never stood under the cross

and never heard Jesus Christ speak through blood-stained lips:

"Father, forgive them."

We need to go there to get it right.

We need to hear those words from that place.

Then, the opening words of today's Gospel will make sense to us:

"To you who hear I say, Love....."

No Audio Available

100

Ash Wednesday

2/25/2004

Joel 2:12-18 + 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 + Matthew 6 :1-6,16-18

Fr. Boyer

Ancient Catechumens, in the rites that moved them to grace and baptism performed a kind of "dance" that acted out in experience what was happening in their hearts.

Led to the font of "living" water, they faced the darkness of the western sky and were asked to reject Satan and his empty promises.

Then they turned and faced the east, where the sun would soon rise.

In this direction they professed their belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.

The turn from west to east, from darkness to light, from Satan to God was all captured in that simple gesture.

We have long ago given up many of those power-filled gestures.

We think of ourselves as far too sophisticated to do that sort of thing.

Baptism has been speeded up, privatized, and sanitized.

"Living water" has been reduced to a splash

that I have seen in some places come from a mason jar off a shelf.

Avoiding the public nature of the commitment,

Baptism was slipped into "free time" on an afternoon when no one but family could possibly hear the profound commitment being made.

The Baptistry took on the appearance of a private chapel with a basin to catch the half cup or less of water that spilled from a baby's head.

Gone was the tomb, the grave that provided the visual connection with dying and rising.

With some relief in our lifetime we welcome a change in practice that now leads us deeper into the mystery.

We are people of the grave - we have come up out of the tomb, and today we shall show our origins.

We are dead people raised up to life.

The ashes of our death will be visible for all to see.

Perhaps we miss half the point if we think these ashes are only a sign of our future.

They are also a sign of our past.

We were dead and we have been raised to life.

In this season, we are a people doing the dance of those early catechumens.

We are turning:

from west and darkness to the east and coming light.

We are turning from old ways to new ways,

from ways of living that lead to death toward ways of living that lead to life.

The most ancient traditions of our faith are rooted in this season

and the three Holy Days to which it leads.
Proven again and again through the centuries,
the power of three things is undisputed and universally practiced
by anyone who stands before God.
Buddhists, Islam, Judaism all know the power of these things.
In our Christian faith, we too embrace these ancient customs
with the full knowledge
that those who practice them cannot possibly fail to turn toward God.

Fasting

Prayer

Almsgiving

----- lead us onto the path of change.

They lift us from the grave and turn us from the west to the east.

These are, in some ways, the steps of the dance.

When we learn them and use them together, we shall be transformed,
and this whole world will be filled with Light and the Presence of Christ.

When Fasting and Prayer and Almsgiving become the steps of Life's great dance,
we shall spring up from the grave and brush aside the dust of death
refreshed in living water,

we shall be stand in the light,

and nothing will ever again be the same.

No Audio Available

101

1st Sunday of Lent

2/29/2004

Deuteronomy 26 :4-10 + Romans 10 :8-13 + Luke 4 :1-13

Fr. Boyer

Earlier this month, two weeks ago, to be exact, we heard Luke interpret for us the words of Jesus we have come to call "Beatitudes."

We saw in Luke's gospel a reflection of the difference between the earlier community of Matthew and the community of Luke which many scholars believe had grown to include people of prestige, power, and wealth.

In Luke's gospel it is really the "woes" that were the heart of his message, not the Blessings.

No spiritualizing or internalization with Luke!

What we get from Luke is a kind of "guidance system"

by which we can navigate our way through

the attitudes, behaviors, and distorted values of a very "less than perfect" world.

Being good people in the absence of a good society is the challenge.

Today it would be easy to think that

we have here a story about Jesus in the desert, but I don't think so.

I would propose that we explore this story with what we know about Luke.

This is not about the temptations of Jesus.

It is a story about the temptations that trouble the powerful, the secure, and the comfortable.

This story is about our temptations,

and we avoid the challenge Luke gives us if we think it's all about Jesus.

Heard in this light, the devil taunts and tempts any who are children of God, but especially those who have food, and power, and security.

"If you are the Son of God," the devil says: "Take care of yourself."

suggesting that no one else will.

"If you are the Son of God," the devil says: "Look at all the stuff you can have! There's your god --- the god of your own making, the god of your greed."

"Worship these things. They will give you pleasure."

"If you are the Son of God," he continues to taunt from the heights of the Temple.

"You can jump." "You know God will take care of you."

(This last one is really a temptation of God, or at least of our concepts of God - so that if God doesn't work the way we want, we'll quit the relationship.)

And so it goes, the story of our temptation.

We have the power to turn stones into bread.

Or we have the power to guns into food and medicine.

It's the same thing.

We have the power to feed the hungry, but we make bombers.

But the issue Jesus confronts is one of power, not of hunger.

It is the question of how and why and when power is to be used.

The Word of God nourishes the Jesus of Luke's Gospel, not bread,
and that's the food that must nourish us with the truth
and give us the strength to rise above power's seduction.

And so it goes, the story of our temptation.
We spend more time shopping in the mall than we do on our knees in a church.
The great cathedrals of consumerism
replace the great cathedrals of worship and prayer.
Television commercials replaces religious education
so our children dream of the latest toy or fashion rather than
dream of a just and peaceful world.

And so it goes, the story of our temptation.
The last temptation turns the tempted into the temptor.
For now it is God who is tempted by this one who is called: "Son of God."
A temptation to live on the wild side, to trust or fool one's self into false security.

In the end, it is all about identity;
the identity of one who is God's own child.
It is that identity the devil calls into question with his taunts:
"If you are God's Son.....
"If you are God's Son.....
"It you are God's Son.....
Well we are God's Son in the Body of Christ,
and those who would learn from Him in the Gospel of Luke
will not seek the easy way or the short cut to glory.

They will not turn stones into bread when their neighbor hungers for peace or acceptance or a
companion.
It is not bread that is needed.
Those would learn from Him will never be confused about their true home
and where they belong.
Nor will they ever think that power and privilege
will secure them a place in that home
rather than sacrifice and love.
No Audio Available

102

2nd Sunday of Lent

3/7/2004

Genesis 15:5-12,17,18 + Philippians 3:17-4:1 + Luke 9:28-36

Fr. Boyer

Here we are in early Lent, with purple in the church, no flowers or plants, the ashes newly washed from our heads, and ideas of Lenten discipline in the air. For some of us, the traditional practice of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving shape the season. Some of us have just today remembered that it's Lent and we should "do something," which probably means "giving something up." For some, all of life feels like Lent, like a wandering in the desert, like a somber, sober facing into death. Some have given Lent little thought at all. To us all comes the Word of God today. The story of Abraham, a story of Jesus transfigured, and Paul grounding us all in Baptism. If Lent is the only time of year when prayer, sacrifice, and fasting occur, it becomes a long season, or no season at all. It is either a serious spiritual experience for us, or it is no experience at all. It either restores and reforms our lives with practices upon which we can build, or it shames us with the superficiality and empty promises that overshadow our whole lives.

The prayer, the fasting, and the sacrificial giving are all really one movement in faith, not separate and distinct from one another. Fasting without prayer is a diet.

Prayer without sacrifice is lip service. Tithing without faith is taxes. These things weave together for people of faith, and this season is a time to restore some balance where one or the other may have gown slack.

It is perhaps a good time, to look with a critical eye at not only our own lives, but at the life we share as a parish community. We have just completed the second month of this New Year. With the third year of the twenty-first century behind us, it is possible to provide an account of our life together, and in the next ten days a printed report will be mailed to every home. It will be the second year for such an annual report here at St. Mark. Today I want to give you some highlights of that report in person. If it were possible, I would personally come to your home and speak with you face to face. This is the best I can do.

The twelve months of 2003 were not years of numerical growth at St Mark. While 153 families registered into the parish, nearly the same number moved away or were removed from the parish list because of inactivity. We counted 1,103 household at this time last year, and presently include 1,109. In terms of actual Catholic people, there are 3,395 of us, and the average age is still 31. The average Sunday attendance in the past year was 1,270, down from 1400 the previous year. These are curious numbers, which suggest that only one out of three of us attends Mass every week, or that most of us attend Mass only once or twice a month. It is a troubling fact; and it sweeps the nation as I hear that the American Bishops have recognized that faithful Sunday Mass attendance is now recognized as a significant problem.

In 2003 we Baptized 41 children: nine more than the previous year. Twenty-two couples were married here: fifteen the year before. Other such statistics were be included in the report. The sacramental life of the parish is full of the spirit of faith.

I am not going to go into detailed statistics at this moment because it will distort the facts and confuse you. You will receive those shortly. What you will see is that in the past twelve months the building fund income is down because many have begun to retire the pledges. In the same time period, the Sunday

collections are up. Some of that suggests that those who have completed pledges to the building fund have continued their giving at the same level by adding their previous pledged amount to their weekly offering. What you will see in number is that our weekly offering income has increased; in fact, by a little more than \$200,000 over the twelve months of 2003. Expenses are down for two reasons: no capital improvements nor furnishing purchases this past year since our move into the new building is now complete. There is also one less full time staff member.

The debt continues to be the biggest burden and limitation on our ability for ministry here to grow in proportion to the population. A parish this size with one priest and two full time employees is not likely to be found in this part of the world. There may be an appearance of order and progress, but I want to tell you clearly that it is only an appearance. Things are not happening that ought to be happening, and everything is slowing down administratively. With no director of Religious Education, we are coasting, and the only way to coast is downhill. It is also time in the life of this parish to put worship first, and the musical part of that worship ought to be high priority. Even though a host of volunteers do their very best, God is not getting the best this parish can do. Too many of you stand with arms folded while others raise their voices in song and praise. We are not in the Hotel anymore, yet much is the same. God is getting what is the left, the spare time, and not the finest and best we can do. The facts indicate that we have paid down \$145,224 on the principal. In proportion to the total debt in excess of \$4 Million, this is a very small amount. We paid \$363,541 interest on that debt this year - by my values as the leader here, we nearly spent half a million dollars to buy money. This is going to go on for a long time. For the next eight years we are locked into a payment plan that will see little progress if interest rates remain below 7.5%. Almost half of our total income goes to the debt.

In terms of our progress, there is good news here; but with it comes great challenge. Those 153 new families are replacing nearly the same number of families who have moved on in their lives to other places. Yet, those of you who have recently come need to know that others made sacrifice and commitments to provide for you, and your immediate willingness to take their place and follow their generous lead is imperative.

The challenge each of us faces day in and day out is to put God first in our lives in a real and concrete way. It cannot be promises for another day. It must be now. Last week the Word of God was proclaimed in this church, and you heard these words: "Moses spoke to the people saying: "The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of God." Then the sacred writer in the name of all the people went on to list some of the wonderful things God had done for those people, concluding with these words: "Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given me."

God receives the first fruits from people who know what God has done for them- not the last or the left over. This order of things is given to us with all the authority of God's Word spoken by the prophet. In reality, it means that when you buy a car, a house, a TV, a stereo, clothing, take a vacation, or go out to dinner, you do that with what is left after you have given to God, not the other way around. Several months ago in talking about the parish expenses someone said to me: "Father, after making the payment on the Lexus and the SUV, the boat, the lake house, two tuitions, and the house payment, there's not much left for the church." I couldn't get home fast enough that night, and I barely slept feeling like a failure. This thinking and this behavior gives no evidence of faith's response to the Word of God which I have given my life to proclaim.

We are about prayer here: prayer and worship. It is through prayer that the vision of today's Gospel first

took place. This means that, for the Lukan community and for those who still dare, prayer becomes the way in which the People of God can gain clarity, and see in faith salvation unfolding in their own time. There has been a vision here at ST Mark: a vision of the Kingdom of God lived and shared in a community that gathers every week to celebrate again, because once or twice a month is never enough, for the promise of Easter.

Our Gospel today speaks to the hopes and dreams of everyone who seeks to discover what the true outcome of human history may be. This vision declares that the fate of Jesus, and the church that forms around him, has a happy conclusion. Not only is the death of Jesus seen as his exodus into the life of God, but now it is not just Moses who enters into the cloud of God's presence, everyone on that hill was surrounded by the cloud. Now all of us who stand before the Holy One and dare to make Him first in our lives, in our service, and in our dreams and visions will know a future of happiness and peace.

No Audio Available

103

3rd Sunday of Lent

3/14/2004

Exodus 3:1-8,13-15 + 1 Corinthians 10:16,10-12 + Luke 13:1-9

Fr. Boyer

"Take off those shoes!" says the voice to Moses. "This is holy ground."

Is it because shoes defile "holy ground"?

Is there something unclean about the shoes or sandals?

Do they somehow track up an otherwise clean and orderly place?

I don't think it has anything to do with what is clean or what dirty.

I think it has to do with contact --- immediate, intimate, touching, contact.

Feet on the ground, bare feet on the real earth, nothing in between - nothing to separate those feet from what is holy.

Moses or anyone else for that matter cannot get near God while anything stands between.

God wants immediate contact, and that realization scares Moses.

He hides his face.

The very idea brings to mind that wonderful behavior of a child who closes their eyes when they want to hide and not be seen or when there is something scary they don't want to see.

Like Moses, we know better.

We might close our eyes in an effort not to look at God, but it does not change the reality that God looks at us, a people in need of liberation.

It does not change what God sees, our needs and our helplessness.

The response of that God is Jesus Christ.

In a sense, Jesus is God without shoes - nothing stands between God and us.

So that nothing could come between us,

Jesus sets aside his "equality with God"

to touch the human experience - flesh on the earth:

the bare feet of God leaving human foot prints:

all to give us hope, to give us a chance, to give us holiness and peace.

The two pieces of this Gospel today speak with an urgent lesson of hope.

Two incidents probably well known to the people of that place at that time are told again to shake the hearer out of complacency and laziness:

to disturb those who always think there will be another time or plenty of time.

Thinking that the disasters mentioned are a punishment for evil is wrong thinking in the mind of Jesus.

It's like suggesting that the people in the Murrah Building or the World Trade Center or the Pentagon were being punished for their sins on those terrible days of tragedy.

Jesus will have none of that thinking - human violence and natural violence have nothing to do with God or punishment.

Jesus uses the memory of those events to call us to readiness

suggesting that we should live at all times in readiness, prepared to die.

Then, lest that readiness lead to fear or anxiety, he completes the lesson with a story of mercy and hope.

The fig tree that gets some extra time and extra attention before it is cut down for lack of fruitfulness gets one final chance.

Luke would have us see that we are now living in that final time when Jesus the caretaker prunes, waters, feeds, and trims us for bearing fruit. He offers us an insight into these days and these times, and using the urgency of the first story, we are reminded of the fragility of life and the urgency of our need for conversion.

In Lent's third week, we are stirred from our habits, our laziness, and our easy denial to see that this is the day for our conversion and renewal.

We use these days to strip away everything that stands between us and holiness itself.

We take off our shoes.

We touch the divine, and the divine touches us in the flesh to make us holy, to make us clean, to make us pure of heart, and sincere in desire.

The God who comes to rescue us would take us by the hand, but we must uncover our eyes, set aside our fear, and look for the face of God, the God who comes to save us and has come as one of us.

No Audio Available

104

4th Sunday of Lent

3/21/2004

Joshua 5:9-12 + 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 + Luke 15:1-3,11-32

Fr. Boyer

As much as we might want or

as much as we might like, the parable is not about us.

As much as we might be a people

who take, waste, squander and pleasure ourselves, it is not about us.

As much as we might be faithful, dependable, hard working and respectful,

it is not about us.

It is about God,

Who waits, watches, runs and finds it necessary to restore what was lost and rejoice in what is found.

But what if he had not been home when the repentant returned?

Or what if he had come home and met his brother first?

What if they had changed the locks or moved away?

What if he waited so long to home that the father died?

These are questions lurking deep within this parable and in the heart of faithful people who reflect upon it's wisdom and its details.

We pause for a moment today, midway to Easter.

Daffodils and Pear Blossoms tell us of what is to come

Even if the grass is still brown and dry.

A story about God excites with a hint of what is to come.

But bringing this story to life takes two movements:

One must stop what he is doing, come to his senses, start home.

The other must leave home and run out to greet the other.

The good news we proclaim in this place is just that.

The Father has left home, and we are wrapped in the cloak of Jesus Christ

if we will just come to our senses and get on the road.

We do not have to get all the way, just get within sight.

Even if all we can do is limp to get there, God can run.

The steps of repentance are slow, but the feet of forgiveness are fast.

I have often wondered about the fatted calf.

Do you suppose there was always one kept in readiness,

in hope that the homecoming would really happen?

This is as much a story of divine behavior as as it is a story of human behavior.

One look at the sons, we know ourselves in both of them.

One good look at this father, and we know God.

Told in this season, at Lent's midway, it proposes that we come to our senses.

It is story always told with an ending.

The party has begun, the dead one is alive, the lost is found;

but the father is left standing outside waiting again for the angry one to come in.

There are all sorts of ideas about why Jesus died,

and "The Movie" everyone is talking about has its own ideas.

I think Jesus died because of the company he kept.

In this part of Luke's Gospel, the Scribes and Pharisees have been complaining because "He eats with sinners."

Jesus chose to keep the company of losers, the unwelcome, and those who had nothing to offer him except rejection and the scorn of others.

The party he describes today in his story about his Father is a party for misfits and sinners.

The righteous, loyal, hard working, and all too perfect son has a hard time finding his place there, and so did the Scribes and Pharisees.

But there is a place for them and for us.

There is a God who stands at the door still waiting, watching, and wanting all His children at the feast.

Whatever is keeping us out is not of God, and it has to go.

No Audio Available

105

5th Sunday of Lent

3/28/2004

Isaiah 43:16-21 + Phillipias 3:8-14 + John 8:1-11

Fr. Boyer

This is a classic story of human behavior,
and an essential lesson in a spirituality that is truly repentant.
The image of these scribes and the Pharisees standing there
with their fingers pointing and their fists full of stones is positively chilling.
So quickly, so easily, so publically they point and accuse, blame and shame.
Then all of a sudden, they are gone.
Sometimes I think their encounter with Jesus is more important than hers.
Certainly, we miss the wealth of this story if we only reflect upon Jesus
or identify with the woman in the story.
She is not the only sinner John puts before us today.

Proclaiming this gospel and pondering its truth in the midst of Lent
leads us to turn our gaze inward and look at ourselves, not someone else.
That is the trouble with these scribes and Pharisees,
and it is the challenge Jesus puts in their face!
"Look at yourselves", he suggests,
"Don't be pointing your finger of accusation and blame at another."
The God of mercy calls us to drop the stones we are so willing and so readily
hurl at another, and use these remaining Lenten days for our own repentance
and our own forgiveness.

There is something always troubling about this story
which is a late addition to John's Gospel
suggesting that the early community had trouble with it
before they inserted it into later manuscripts.
Adultery is a sin committed by a woman and man.
The law prescribes that both the man and the woman should be put to death.
That prescription is found in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy,
but there is no evidence that the law was ever enforced;
in fact, to protect the innocent, more than one witness was required.
While the words of Jesus to the woman give us a strong focus on God's mercy,
the absence of the other party to this sin allows us to shift our attention in the context of John's Gospel
to the scribes and Pharisees.

This is another of many confrontation stories between Jesus
and these scribes and Pharisees.
He confronts a kind of scribe and Pharisee that can exist in any religious group or business, or
community-
those who are inflexibly certain that they are right, and that the truth begins and ends with them.
The scribes in this gospel are so certain Jesus is not from God that to get evidence against him they are
willing to use a woman, publically shame her, perhaps protect her male partner, and forget that they
themselves are sinners.

Unlike them, Jesus condemns no one,
neither the woman nor the scribes and Pharisees.
Instead, by his silence, he creates some space for them to see themselves,
and give them room for self-recognition.
It is interesting to note that the first ones to leave are the elders.
The law requires that they initiate the stoning by throwing first.
As they depart, we have a sense that they do so with the stones still in their hands.
They will be back pointing their fingers in accusation
and raging with their death demands.
The next time their victim will be the one who saves them.

Somewhere in this story, we must find ourselves:
either in the one who got away,
the one who knows the mercy and compassion of God,
or the ones who point and accuse failing to recognize, in spite of all the signs,
the presence of the one who has come to set them free.
Or perhaps we can begin to find ourselves in the Holy One who is by his gentleness the very healing,
loving, forgiving presence of God.
However it works, we cannot stand outside the story and be spectators
or there will be no conversion in our hearts.
No Audio Available

106

Passion Sunday

4/4/2004

Isaiah 50:4-7 + Phillipias 2:6-11 + Luke 22:14-22:56

Fr. Boyer

"Innocent" is the verdict.

Pilate knows it.

Herod knows it.

A crucified criminal knows it.

A centurian knows it.

And because of Luke, we know it too.

It's all about innocense in Luke's Passion,
and that suffering innocense might well serve as our focus
during these days made sacred by love and sacrifice.

We do not live these days well if we spend them in sorrowful nostalgia,
even if it seems sympathetic and well intentioned.

The sufferings of Jesus are no more.

Our remembrance of those horrible sufferings must renew our sensitivity
to the sufferings that continue for those who are today the Body of Christ.

The Way of the Cross is still be walked by the innocent,
and none more so than the children of this world:

150 Million of them by United Nations reports in 2002.

Ten million in Brazil alone.

Six innocent children die every day at the hands of law enforcement officers in Columbia says the
Human Rights Watch.

In Indonesia and throughout Asia

they slave in sweatshops to keep us in cheap clothes.

In Uganda 8,400 children have been abducted to serve as slaves

to members of the rebel movement known as the "Lord's Resistance Army."

Around the world 120,000 children every day are aborted.

Jesus looks us in the eye today

knowing that this week we run the risk of dwelling only on his suffering.

Every time we read Luke's Passion he says again:

"Weep not for me, weep for yourselves and for your children."

Today this gift of Jesus must prompt us to move beyond
gazing at the cross or weeping at its memory.

His way of the cross has ended in victory and peace,
but the way for those for whom he died is still be travelled.

We are to be their companions, care givers, and defenders along the way.

And when it happens that we too suffer in innocence

by the words and deeds of those we love,

we shall make his prayer our own, and his wish of forgivenss prevail.

No Audio Available

107

Holy Thursday

4/8/2004

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14 + 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 + John 13:1-15

Fr. Boyer

We are poised now to begin the Passover.

Our slavery to sin, our helplessness, our shame in a life behind us
is at an end.

Our time in an Egypt of sin is finished.

If we have passed the forty days well at all,

we emerge from our Lenten journey

with nothing but what we find here today:

Bread, Wine, Water.

All that we have clung to, hoarded, hidden, and prized is gone.

What we thought would get us through,

thought would serve us well,

thought might protect us and comfort us is gone.

The things we thought would gain us power, respect, and control

have been proven useless.

Things like wealth and weapons get us nowhere near peace.

The military gets bigger, security gets tighter, and our old and poor get hungry

so that we can protect ourselves.

Great jobs, benefits, and huge homes never give us good sleep at night.

We have to set our alarms, bring in the dog, and have the cell phone at hand,

and even then we keep wondering if everything secure.

This night we emerge from the desert

as we shall emerge from the wilderness of this life.

Only three things will be left.

Three things do not and will not fail us as we pass our days of journey

to the promised land of God's presence:

Water, Bread, and Wine.

These are the symbols we hold dear, the things that will bring us through.

Water for washing.

Bread for Breaking.

Blood for loving.

Those men at the table would have eaten without washing.

They have been arguing about who of them is most important.

So convinced of their privilege, so proud of their rights,

so convinced of their importance, they have missed something.

In the home of the rich, a servant would have met them at the door

and cleansed away the dirt of their travel.

But this is not the home of the rich.

In such simple surroundings, those who had arrived first

would have helped those who came after

with this simple act of courtesy and kindness, but not these men.

They would rather compete with one another for the best seat at the table.
And so he gets up, and he does what they are unwilling to do,
and therein lies the secret - he does what they are unwilling to do.

Bread for Breaking

Bread for passing to others

Bread to dip into the dish with the master.

Bread made from thousands of wheat grains thrown everywhere

by a sower of great generosity gathered in a harvest of kindness

is not just bread to nourish our bodies,

but service to nourish our souls.

It is the breaking that makes the difference,

the breaking of our hearts at the site of suffering,

the breaking our busy day or our precious plans that make a difference

for another who may interrupt us with their need.

Wine for loving

There is no joy, no refreshment, no true delight
until the cup is passed and the wine is poured out.

One grape makes no wine; but on the fruitful vine, all the grapes

crushed together fill the wineskins of life to breaking,

and poured out in love, passed in joy, and shared in fellowship,

a bond of blood unites and binds together those who gather at the table.

Tonight we gather in this holy place with the things Jesus has left us.

They are his testament, his treasure, gifts he has left us in his memory.

Neither gold nor silver, property or land: nothing we should hold on to.

He left us actions to remember, works of service and humble love,

by them we are marked for life.

Blood fellowship and a certain quiet joy

are the hallmarks of this night's celebration.

This night is different from all other nights.

This night Christ will feed us and unlike our Fathers in the desert,

we will live forever on this food.

This is the celebration on earth as it is in heaven where Christ will comfort us and delight us because we

dare to want to be free, to receive love and to share love.

This is all we need: Water to wash away the dust of our journey, a cup of blood and a broken body come
to life again.

Through these gifts we come to life.

With these gifts we make our way.

In these gifts we find our joy.

For these gifts now we give thanks.

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Good Friday

4/9/2004

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 + Hebrews 4:14-16: 5:7-9 + John 18:1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

"We adore you O Christ and we praise you, for by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world."

We have said it over and over and over again.

That the world is in need of redemption is painfully clear;

and the history of human efforts in that regard is a history of failure.

The eventual intervention of God is our best hope,

and the cross we so respectfully and solemnly honor and venerate today

is the symbol of that hope.

Traditional explanations of the cross that speak of "ransom" "sacrifice" or "fulfillment of the Father's Will" are subject to great misunderstanding that either lead to scandal or reduce the cross to insignificance.

To think that the Father demanded the horrible death of His son is scandalous.

No parent asks their child's death

before being willing to fix something that is broken,

even if it is the whole universe.

That is a false image of God that has led too many to reject our faith.

God asks for Love and Obedience, not a ugly and violent death.

Jesus was killed because he refused to stop loving.

He refused to stop his challenge to a world's way of doing things.

The focus of Christian spirituality

is the development of living, loving, dynamic relationship with God.

As with every relationship that is living and loving,

there is always "sacrifice" to be made, to be given, to be offered for the other.

That sacrifice expresses itself in good works that strengthen the relationship.

The result of that sacrifice of love is "consolation", but that is not its goal.

The word "sacri/ficare" means "to make holy."

We usually do that by setting something aside,

taking it out of use for the common or the ordinary,

and holding it exclusively for God.

The consequence of that sacrifice is to "give it up".

Our Christian tradition recognizes

that to become holy somehow involves giving something up.

The cross was Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

It was the expression of his love, the ultimate self-gift.

The only way he could have avoided that death

would have been to renounce the love that motivated his life and his work.

He refused to stop loving.

Peter suggested once that there might have been an easier way to accomplish that mission of redemption without suffering,

and it must have been a very tempting proposal.

But Jesus recognized that lie and rejected it.

He called it "human reasoning" and contrasted it with "divine wisdom."
His love conquers evil.
His refusal to limit his love, his act of sacrifice, leads directly to the cross.
It is a love free of selfishness and any hint of self-centeredness.
The cross redeems the world because it is the sign of that love,
and that kind of love is the only love that can redeem.
It is the only kind of love that can reconcile.
It is the only kind of love that can bring peace.
This is the "peace" that Christ brings to the world.

The peace of Christ is not what the world imagines peace to be.
Jesus warns us about that when he says:
"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth;
I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."
The world thinks of peace as confirming the status-quo,
of stopping challenges,
of leaving things as they are,
or removing conflict.
Jesus did not come to leave things as they are.
His mission was to rearrange things,
and so the peace for which we pray,
the peace that comes from union with God includes profound changes in our lives and in this world.

Too often the "peace" we want is a subtle form of selfishness or hedonism.
Not getting that "right" is why the cross so easily turns into a piece of jewelry.
The cross we venerate this day is neither gold nor silver.
It is wood: the real thing
that speaks of the sacrifice of love, suffering, and death.
It speaks to us of real, honest, perfect love,
the kind of love we can only find in God and hope to imitate.
This is a love totally free of self-concern
a love that never considers one's own good.
Jesus is that love made flesh.
His entire life was an actualization of that selfless love.
He loved the world the way the Father loved the world,
and nothing could stop him from loving,
not even the loss of peace and tranquility, and his own life.
His love made the world holy.

The chaos of this world comes from a false kind of love
that is based upon pleasure that gives rise to competition,
the pursuit of security and control at all costs,
and selfishness.
That love cannot comprehend
the length and breadth and height and depth of God's love made flesh in Jesus.
That is why the cross confounds the ignorant and shames the world.
It demands conversion, the unity of all humanity,
cooperation, hospitality, vulnerability, a quest of justice;

and getting there will involve some birth pangs,
death to an old life in which we are broken,
and birth to a new one that is more whole.
It will require the courage to live God's love
in the midst of chaos and opposition from a world that have everything to lose.

The cross we lift today,
the cross we touch today,
the cross we kiss today is the sign of love made perfect.
It is our best hope for peace, because it is a love that means love of enemy.
It is our only hope,
and the only Joy that will last.
Come, let us adore!
Come.
Let us be transformed by love!
No Audio Available

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Easter Vigil

4/10/2004

Luke 24:1-12

Fr. Boyer

This is the night.

There is no other like it.

Since Thursday, we have washed feet here.

We have fasted in various ways to grow hungry
for the words and deeds of this night.

We have come in the darkness,
gathered at a fire, followed the great pillar of light
and proclaimed over and over: "This is the night."

We have spent a long time with our book,
listening in the darkness to the stories and poems
that unfold for us the plan of God.

We have dined on the story of creation,
the the delivereance from oppression to freedom,
the passionate love of God and the people of Israel,
and we have proclaimed the death of the Lord into which we have been baptized, and we proclaim his
resurrection.

At least, we proclaim that the tomb is empty.

What to make of that empty tomb is what the rest of our lives will be about.

What is to come tonight sketches out the shadow of that future.

We will call out the names of all our saints,
our holy ancestors in this faith;

we will invite the elect and those to be confirmed to renounce evil with us,
and enter into the mystery of redemption by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then, we shall lead them to the table,
bring good bread and wine and together,
lift up our hearts in praise and thanks to God.

Finally we shall share that meager bread and a sip of the cup of wine made blood,
for this is what we are now, all of us, the body and blood of Christ.

This is our future, and it is how we shall proclaim the death of the Lord
until he comes in glory.

We shall live in the communion of saints.

We shall live in contrast and in contest with evil.

We shall bring the hungry to feast on the Word,
and invite them join us at this table.

We shall look into the empty tombs of lonely lives,
broken hearts, and the sorrowful;
and we shall remember this night,
and shall bring them hope.

We will remember the words of Paul:

"You baptzied people are dead people.
Christ lives, and that is how we live now, as He has lived among us.
Those women who looked into that empty tomb did not know what to make of it
until they remembered.

That then is what we are doing here tonight:
Remembering.
This is the night.
This is the night to remember.
This is the night to rejoice.
This is the night for us all to rise up,
to cast aside the darkness and its deeds.
This is the night when Christ born in us, lives in us, and with Him we live forever.

So now, we get on our feet.
We call the elect.
Invoke the presence of Holy People,
and after months and months of waiting
and forty days of penance, prayer, and sacrifice,
we go to the water and lead these chosen ones through it
to freedom and life everlasting.
No Audio Available

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Easter

4/11/2004

Acts:10:33-43 + 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 + Luke 24.12-35

Fr. Boyer

It is a great privilege and a joy to welcome our visitors and the guests who are with us today. The community of believers who celebrate the Resurrection in this holy place every week welcomes you, and it is a thrill to squeeze together and have you here on this holiest of Sundays.

With the Word of God today, we give clear evidence of what we believe and of what it means:
that Christ, the Son of God is risen from the dead,
and that we who have come to believe this are rising with him.

What happened to Jesus of Nazareth on the third day after his death on the cross is of no interest to us. There is no information other than the record that his followers found an empty tomb, and some of them claimed to have seen him later. Today's Gospel from Luke provides that information. The rest of the story directs our attention to what matters most: not what happened, not what happened to that body and where it went; but rather what it meant to rise from the dead, and what it continues to mean. We may not know what happened to Jesus, but we can certainly know what happened to those who have given witness to his death and resurrection.

In his life and his teaching among us, Jesus claimed to be God's chosen one, the one through whom the fulfillment of God's promises would be accomplished. If anyone claimed such a thing and died that claim would die with them. But, to make that claim, die, and rise from that death gives legitimacy to the claim; and we can believe it. How we come to believe it rests upon three pieces of evidence.

The first piece of evidence: an empty tomb. It is, at best, a questionable piece of evidence, because what it means is that the body was gone, not necessarily that He was risen.
The second piece of evidence: some people claimed to have seen him. Since mystical experiences of people are unique and difficult to prove, this is not a lot to go on either.
The third piece of evidence however is something quite different. It is the quality of the lives of those who live out their faith in the Resurrection. We see it clearly in those whose names we know, like Peter who went from misunderstanding the Scriptures to interpreting them; like Paul who set out to put Christians to death, only to become the champion of the "dying and rising Christ."

We see what happens in the lives of countless women and men today and in our past who are and have been examples of extraordinary integrity in the midst of deceit.

We see what happens in the lives of people of dedicated and selfless sacrifice in a world of selfishness and hedonism.

We see what happens in people of patience and understanding in the face of violence, or forgiveness and reconciliation where there has been personal violation.

Such lives are evidence that Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive in the world today.

If an empty tomb is not enough;

if the testimony of those who were there is not enough;

then the lives of those who shape their values,

their relationships, and their decisions upon what Christ has taught us will be.
Such lives are our experience of the risen Lord,
one who not stop loving,
one who not stop forgiving,
one who would not abandon his trust in God his father.

This is the day when we celebrate the one who would not give up on us;
the one who would not stay dead.
He broke the hold that death had over us all.
Death could not keep him down,
and if we are joined to him, neither can it keep us down.

Our Joy today is selfish in some sense;
because we have put on a new life,
not new clothes.
If new hats, suits, shoes, or dresses were bought for this day,
they must simply be signs of the new life we have put on in Christ.

By the grace of God,
the power of Easter at work in us will so transform us
that people will wonder about us too,
will wonder, "What happened"?
They will come to believe in the Resurrection
because we live through and with and in the one who has Life
and whose life we proclaim and make our own.
No Audio Available

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2nd Sunday of Easter

4/18/2004

Acts:5:12-16 + Revelation 1:9-11,12-13,17-19 + John 20:19-31

Fr. Boyer

Thirty-six years ago this was the Gospel on the Sunday of my First Mass in Thanksgiving at St. John the Baptist Church in Edmond, Oklahoma.

It is always the Gospel on the Sunday after Easter.

In it we are always promised peace,
comforted by the Easter faith of the apostolic church,
entrusted again with our mission as people of God,
and stunned by the simplicity and purity of the first creed proclaimed by Thomas.

To really draw from this Gospel its deepest truth,
and to penetrate the meaning of the resurrection,
we must remember that this Gospel
was composed for the third generation of believers.

None of them had "seen the Lord".

This narrative then is not just about Thomas.

It is about people who are coming to faith in the resurrection
and have never seen the Lord.

In John's Gospel, there is no Ascension.

John is unfolding the mystery of the "Glorification" of Jesus Christ.

In his understanding, the return of Jesus to heaven
has not left the community orphans.

In fact, what happens is:

they begin to discover how the risen one lives in their midst.

Instead of assigning the death, resurrection, and ascension to points in time,
John saw a single activity of the Father.

The difficulty John confronts is that the whole experience is too good to be true.

We approach every extraordinary and wonderful event with disbelief.

Whatever it is, it is always too good to be true,

and we eventually have to overcome that "disbelief" by surrendering to it.

Thomas had to surrender in faith to the One who has been glorified.

Jesus has fulfilled what he promised.

He has come again and is seen.

The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit has come,
and those who gather even with their doubts

are to continue the work of confronting sin,

which in John's Gospel is rejection of belief in Jesus as the Son sent by the Father.

(See John 8:21-24)

It is "sin" that Jesus confronts here - disbelief.

This is about believing, not about doubting

Notice that Jesus says: "Do not be unbelieving."

It is dis-belief that is confronted here, not doubt.

When Thomas is confronted by the Word in his disbelief,
he surrenders - he does not touch the wounds.

The oldest dream in the human heart has come true.
We can believe it. It is not too good to be true.
Everything that comes from God is "good."
Nothing is "too good."
In the end, the faith of Thomas;
the faith of all who have not seen
rests upon individual response in faith to the Word.

Reliance on past accounts is not what matters.
They may awaken one to pay attention, to look, to listen;
but in the end, the foundation of hope comes from our own belief in Christ risen.
We might at first seek signs and wonders,
visions, and all kinds of extraordinary ways to believe,
but we should not depend on them.
The greatest sign God has given is the resurrection of Jesus itself,
and the surest way to come into contact with this sign
is the presence of the Spirit in the world,
in a people raised up.

It is why we gather in this holy place.
It is why we bring our children here.
It is why we tell them of Jesus Christ, His victory, and his mission.
It is why we walk through the waters of Baptism
and call down again and again the gift of the Spirit.
Christ alive, yesterday, today, and forever.
He is not gone from us.
He is within us, and like Thomas, we shall come to know him
and confront our disbelief in this room in the company of others
who share in his glory, who share in his life, and who share in his Spirit.

Thank you for accepting me into this community with such open hearts.
I begin my thirty-seventh year of priesthood with joy with gratitude and hope, because I have come to
count on your support and encouragement; and I never feel as though I am without your companionship
in these years of my life.

As long as God gives me voice to proclaim this Gospel I shall do so,
but I want you to pray with me today that other voices will be raised from among us. Pray for your
children to find the vocation to which God has called them; or pray for yourself that you may have the
wisdom and the courage to find yourself standing here if you seek God's will.

No Audio Available

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3rd Sunday of Easter

4/25/2004

Acts:5:27-32,40,41 + Revelation 5:11-14 + John 21:1-14

Fr. Boyer

There will be sermons

about fish, sheep, Saint Peter, sharing food, and breakfast all over the world today.

But not here.

I know about those sermons because I have preached them in the past.

There is a huge treasure of insight, faith, and revelation
in all the details of this resurrection-gospel story.

This year however, I would like to root this Gospel into this season,
because by choosing it for these weeks between Easter and Pentecost,
there is another focus that we might ignore or miss at some other time of the year.

Jesus resurrected in glory is the focus here.

His instruction to Peter is an instruction for us all.

We stand before Him again and again as a people of denial.

Few of us could even claim to have denied Jesus as few as three times!

This is the Jesus who was rejected, crucified, and dismissed.

He and His message were refused by a world that preferred
power, efficiency, order and control
to peace, tolerance, and forgiveness.

It is this rejected and wounded Jesus who asks:

"Do you love me?"

He did not ask them how things were going?

He did not say: "How many have you converted?"

He did not inquire about their economic success.

He simply asked: "Do you love me?"

There is no little significance in the fact that Jesus equated loving Him
with feeding and tending his sheep.

Those words to Peter are repeated in our hearing today
so that we may be renewed as a church in our resolve
to make our love for Jesus real by feeding and tending others.

I believe that the time will come
when this question will be asked of each one of us.

When that eternal morning comes
and we are finished with the work of our lives,
we shall stand before the risen Lord.

The whole of our lives, like the whole of night of fishing will be over.

He will ask us only one question,
and by our answer we shall judge ourselves.

If we have lived by faith and conscience
rather than by human convention and compromise,
we shall be invited to come and eat at the eternal banquet.

Until then, our reading of this story as we look forward to Pentecost
gives us hope
that the Spirit poured out upon us will give us courage
to face the same opposition met by the risen One
and endure the same rejection and dismissal.
That is the consequence of living by conscience.
It is what happens to those who question human convention and values.
It is what lies in the future for those, like Peter, who will feed and care
for those the powerful of this world dismiss.
For raising their voices, they will pay a price.
They may be called "unpatriotic".
They may be accused of giving aid and comfort to the "enemy."
But a dead child is dead child.
God does not know the boundaries and frontiers we draw on the face of His earth.
God does not see the differences we make in politics and governments.
God cannot possibly notice or care about color or language.

While this gospel speaks
of the necessary universality of the mission
by its reference to fish in great numbers;
While this gospel speaks
of forgiveness and redemption by Peter's rehabilitation;
and while it also speaks of the price paid for authentic discipleship,
it is proclaimed at a season when we look toward Pentecost
with the sure and certain hope that the Spirit will be with us,
give us the words to speak,
and the courage to fulfill what Jesus asks of those who love him.
"Feed my lambs."
"Tend my sheep."
In the face of that command, we can do nothing better today than pray:
"Come Holy Spirit."
No Audio Available

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4th Sunday of Easter

5/2/2004

Acts: 13:13,43-52 + Revelation 7:9,14-17 + John 10:27-30

Fr. Boyer

"THE FATHER AND I ARE ONE!"

It is verse thirty of chapter ten.

This is the ultimate expression of what "Jesus" means.

In those six English words, the identity of the risen Christ is proclaimed.

In them we understand all that John has to say about Jesus.

This is why his listeners picked up rocks to stone him.

This is why believers have gone to their death in every generation since then.

The Gospel of John, and the other gospels too for that matter,

are not history reports of what Jesus said and did,

they are about who Jesus is and what it means.

This Sunday the Church reflects upon who Jesus is and what it means.

Next Sunday we shall reflect upon who we are and what it means.

In all the other Gospels, Jesus is portrayed in one way or another as a Jew.

He is a Pharisee, a Rabbi, a Teacher: always in the context of Judaism.

In John's Gospel this is not so.

Listen in the Easter weeks as we work our way through the identity of Jesus from John's perspective.

Notice how Jesus stands outside of Judaism.

He talks to the Jews, they react to him.

Some are against him.

Some are with him, but he is always distinct from them.

What is emerging in this Gospel is an image of God revealed by Jesus.

This talk of "Shepherd" and the image that goes with it

must be heard in the context of Jesus.

In the Hebrew scriptures "Shepherd" and "King" are linked together.

Remember David the "King".

Remember where he came from - he was the shepherd boy.

When John has Jesus speak of himself as "Shepherd"

don't be getting all sentimental and romantic with thoughts of little woolly lambs

cuddling up to someone who just crawled out of a dryer with sheets of "Bounce" clinging to his white robes.

This is revolutionary talk.

These are the images of a King, a Leader, whose presence and whose message sets people against one another.

Hear that talk about sheep of one fold and sheep of another.

Yet this is noble talk,

and in Israel, these are images of God;

and so those six words of verse thirty in chapter ten

are an Act of Faith, a proclamation that Israel's Lord is present

in Jesus Christ.

There is then a political dimension to the Gospel,
and people who belong to the "flock" of Jesus,
who live by the Word of God
who are God's people
are political revolutionaries.

They will stand against laws, office holders, and regimes
because their first loyalty and their own identity is with God.

This is not just spiritual stuff.

It is real.

It is social.

It is political.

It is economic.

It is not just about the soul, it is about the whole human person.

Jesus cured people. He did not just go around and say: "God loves you."

He made a difference now, in this world, in time;
not in some far off-distant "heavenly" realm.

To see Jesus as an "a-political" person
alters sharply the biblical figure of the Lord as Shepherd.

The Bible is not a book that has an exclusively "spiritual" meaning.

To think that way is to seriously misinterpret it.

It is always concerned about the whole life of people.

Atheists and atheistic governments have always known that
which is why they out-law or ban the Bible from their realm.

Our response to Jesus Christ is not then simply a spiritual response either.

It is a total response of the whole person.

It does not simply make us pious. It makes us just.

It does not simply make us holy. It makes us free.

It does not just give us a vision of the Kingdom of God.

It gives us the way to get there.

Our response is not simply to pray, but to act.

There is a difference in us, in our behavior, not just in our soul.

Proclaimed in these days between Easter and Pentecost,
this Gospel looks ahead to what we shall become by the power of the Spirit.

We shall become, or because of it, we are
a force that can bring a breath of new life and the power of the Spirit like Fire
to transform our world because we can see and we believe
that God has come to be with us, and has called us by name.

No Audio Available

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5th Sunday of Easter

5/9/2004

Acts:14:21-27 + Revelation 21:1-5 + John 13:31-33,34,35

Fr. Boyer

From the identity of Jesus and what it means in last week's readings, we are led this week to consider our identity and what it means.

The "glorification" Jesus speaks of and anticipates in John's Gospel chapter after chapter is that moment, that experience, when His oneness with God is unmistakable.

It means that his presence can no longer be misunderstood nor seen as anything other than the presence of God.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is his glorification.

For those who recognize the meaning of his death and resurrection, the love of God is revealed.

What seems to the unbeliever to be a scandal, a disappointment, the destruction of a human life, and the end of all hope is really the moment of Glory.

All that Jesus had is given to the community.

It was the heart of his final prayer in that upper room, and it was his mission, a mission he fulfilled.

The love of the Son is revealed as the very essence of divine life, which is being poured out into the community.

All that Jesus had was love, and he gave it all.

What the Father had given him was what he gave to his disciples.

When he proclaimed that He and the Father were one, it was LOVE that they shared.

What the Son provided was the mutual indwelling love of God.

What Jesus gave was his flesh, his body, his blood, his will so that the Love of God would have a dwelling place, be accessible, be available, be ours.

Once we understand this, the commandment to "Love one another" is not simply as a moral mandate.

It becomes an expression of the belief that the very life of the community, in love for one another,

is the further outgrowth of the divine revelation we have received through the Son.

One follows the other.

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Means that the dynamic of love between us

is the same mutual love found between God and Jesus, His Son.

If Jesus says: "The Father and I are one." as we heard in last week's Gospel, then our love for one another puts us in the same relationship.

If Jesus is the sign of God's presence,
then our love for one another is the same sign,
and by our surrender to that love, to that presence, to that relationship,
we too are "glorified",
and others will see and find what we have seen and found in Jesus.

This kind of love is new to the world,
and this kind of love makes the world new.
It is a love that means opening doors we may have closed against others.
It is a love that means we will respond to appeals that cry out for our help,
to forgive oversights or mistakes that someone may have made.
This is a love that means opening our eyes to facts that we might otherwise overlook:
that the poor in the world belong to our family;
that those who live in despair might be saved by our care for them;
that peace can come to the world through our efforts.

That vision of a new heaven and a new earth we just heard about
remains in the future only because we have failed to live it in the present.
The resurrection of Jesus makes all things new, not just for him, but for us all.
The glorification for which he longed is already accomplished.
It is now and it is within our power
to fashion a world, a country, a neighborhood, a family
where there is genuine love for one another
and sincere concern for the well being of all.

We have been raised with Jesus, and no power on earth can really conquer us.
We have received the Spirit he promised.
We have the gifts it takes to set this world on fire with love.
It is no longer the gifts of the Spirit for which we wait,
now it is the fruits of those gifts that remain to be manifest:
LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, GOODNESS, FRIENDLINESS,
FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF CONTROL.
As we look toward Pentecost,
it must not be simply a matter of what gifts we receive,
but rather of how those gifts are manifest in our lives,
because in Jesus Christ,
we and the Father are one.
No Audio Available

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6th Sunday of Easter

5/16/2004

Acts:15:1-2,22-29 + Revelation 21:10-14,22,23 + John 14,23-29

Fr. Boyer

During these Sundays between Easter and Pentecost,
there is no way of escaping reflections on identity:
the identity of Christ the Risen the Lord,
and the identity of his followers.

We have heard this more clearly than ever the last two Sundays,
and it comes again today.

Sometimes we identify a thing by its properties or a person by their gifts.

We examine components, how they work and fit together,
and then give a name based on those properties.

Sometimes we do this by contrast.

We look at one thing and then another,
we observe what is different between them,
and we name them by distinction.

That is what is going on at this point in John's Gospel.

John identifies Jesus as "Truth" by looking at his properties.

"Truth" in John's gospel has nothing to do with intellectual research.

It is not the opposite of a "lie."

"Truth" in Old Testament literature means the fidelity of God to His people.

As the word develops in later literature,
it came to mean the revealed mystery of God.

"Truth" then, in John's Gospel raises the issue of God's faithful presence revealed.

When Jesus calls himself "The Truth" he is not speaking of honesty,
he is speaking of his relationship with the Father.

Those of us who live in the "truth" are people who live in the presence of God.

To have the "truth" is not to possess something, but to be something.

At the same time today, we consider identity the other way -
by contrast to something else.

The difference between disciples of Jesus and the world
is precisely the love that consists in faithfulness to his word.

We shall know who we are,
and others shall recognize us
by what we are not;
not of this world.

In these weeks since Easter,

we have walked with the disciples of Jesus

into the mystery of what has happened to us because of the Resurrection.

We have gone deeper into the mystery of what it means,
and what our lives mean because of that Resurrection.

A church, you and me, (not an institution), is filled with the presence of God.

This world may not yet understand, believe, nor see God in us
because too often we are more like this world than we are like the God
whose life and whose spirit fills and sustains us.
We are too slow to believe in the resurrection and what it means for us.
We spend too much time thinking it is about Jesus,
and that becomes a way of avoiding what it means for us.
We spend too much time waiting for something to happen
rather than making something happen with the gifts we already have.
It is not a matter of having more or anything.
It is a matter of doing something with what we have.

We are the Spirit filled Church.
We are now all that Jesus has been.
Our mission, our purpose in this time and in this life is identical to his.
It is about Glory - about seeing the Truth in each other.
It is about being the Truth.

That truth is a principal of moral living.
It guides our decisions.
It guides our relationships
It guides our vision of what we shall be.
As long as there is revenge rather than forgiveness,
there is no faith, no obedience to the Word, no life.
As long as there is violence rather than peace,
there is no faith, no obedience to the Word, no life.
It has nothing to do with anyone else or "the world."
It has to do with us.
When we are living in the Truth and filled with the Spirit,
we will be different from the world,
and only then will the world have hope,
because without us standing in contradiction,
the world is left to its violent, empty, desolate ways.
It is Jesus, risen who speaks to us today.
It is the Spirit that we hear in this place.
It is God who says: "I will not leave you."
I will not leave you to kill and isolate, to alienate and destroy.
I will send my Spirit to remind you,
to teach you again what I have said through my Son.
We do not have the luxury of amnesia - we do not get the excuse that we "forgot."
Baptized and Raised with Christ Jesus,
the presence of God will be made known in this world through us,
or there is no God at all.
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Acts 1:1-11 + Ephesians 1:17-23 + John 17:20-26

Fr. Boyer

For the past two Sunday John's Gospel has described the relationship of Jesus with God and with his disciples through which we have examined the identity of Jesus and our own in the language of friendship, love and belonging.

There was the shepherd who knew his sheep and whose sheep knew him. He laid down his life for them, and then he whispered the divine name into the darkness of the divine mystery and called God, "Father."

He spoke of the oneness between himself and this "Father", and he called us "friends" because he had made known to us everything he had heard from this "Father."

He gave us everything the Father had given him.

This Gospel talk is "theological language." It is not the stuff of a romance novel nor a suspense story. It is as different a language as Greek or Arabic, Hebrew or Japanese is from our English.

We are not going to understand the story if we do not learn the language.

We may use the words, and they may sound familiar, but they will not lead us to Truth as we defined it last week unless we use them as they were intended.

It is the same for Unity. Biblical unity does not mean uniformity. Biblical Unity is rooted in a union of love and respect.

This was the struggle of the earliest church.

They had to realize that their unity in Christ did not mean uniformity in appearance nor in observance of the Jewish laws.

The words of Jesus spoken to us today call us to a vision of unity we have not yet fully realized.

Somehow in these days and in this nation it seems more distant and impossible than ever.

Our lives spiritually and politically have become so isolated that the unity for which Jesus prays almost seems beyond our reach.

Unity that is not inclusive of human diversity is not unity at all.

We are called to Unity, and the only way there is through Love.

Again, this is a new language. Unity in the language of God's Word is not conformity; but oneness as the Father and the Son are One. Their difference is not lost in the unity of their love.

Love in the language of the God's Word is not sentiment and emotion. It is power and sacrifice and service.

The two fundamental needs of any human being are solitude and community. We want sometimes to be alone, but to be "all alone" is the essence of hell. It is not enough to be touched and greeted; our solitude must be protected and respected. Love as we find it revealed in God's Word is that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other. To be "all one" is the essence of heaven, sharing that total and eternal reality which Jesus taught us to call "Father".

Today's Feast is not about the going away of Jesus. It is about Unity. I believe that where Jesus is, we are to be found. While I cannot explain that mystery, I can hold to the conviction that in returning to God,

Jesus has taken us with him. We are, in Jesus, back where we belong. If we do not hold to this hope, then the ascension seems to be a separation; but the Spirit insists that that we believe in the nearness of God.

The reign of God is a kingdom of justice, of peace, and love.

It will never be achieved by human effort alone, but never without humans.

And so we pray every day and some of us more than that: "Thy Kingdom Come" and we work to bring it about.

When I am just,

when I am a peacemaker,

when I love or am in love,

I am in God.

Perhaps if this truth enters more deeply into our lives

and our search for understanding,

we will know more truly the unity for which Christ prays

and toward which the Spirit continues to draw us.

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Pentecost

5/30/2004

Acts 2:1-11 + 1 Corinthians 12:3-7,12-13 + John 20:19-23

Fr. Boyer

It is so easy to get caught up in the excitement of these readings today.

The images are so powerful and vivid:

not just tongues of fire and a mighty wind,

but also these disciples who are so transformed by their experience in that room.

From fear to courage,

from locked doors to wide open windows,

from the shame of their betrayal to the pride of their calling,

from the silence of whispered wishes to the bold proclamation,

even an unbeliever would have to be impressed and filled with awe.

A transformation of such significance can only be the work of God.

Yet to look only at them,

to wonder only about their witness

and to remember this story in terms of what they did and of how they spoke

is to be removed from the story and stand like an unbeliever in the face of the facts.

It is so easy, and we have all done it,

so easy to hear these verses from Acts of the Apostles

and wonder "How did they do that?" How did they speak in all those tongues?

all the while ignoring what they said!

The issue is not how they spoke in all those tongues;

but what they had to say, and that fact that some actually LISTENED!

I would like to put it another way -

and give you something to take home today.

Talking is not nearly as important as listening.

It is the listening that makes a difference.

Pay attention to the story of this day.

The first important verse here for us is:

"each one heard them speaking in his own language."

Something happened that day because the crowd stopped to listen.

That had to happen first.

What good would the gifts of the apostles had been

if no one had been willing to listen?

We are reminded today more about listening than about talking.

If the apostles had not listened to Jesus, they would have had nothing to say.

If the people in the streets had not listened to the apostles,

nothing would have happened that would have made any difference.

The listening changed everything, not just the talking.

What good can it do to say "I'm sorry." if no one listens to the message?

We have all become so good at talking,

and most of us feel as though we have so much to say;
but as one of the chief "talkers" in this community,
I remind myself every day about the need to listen.

Talking gets all wrapped up with power and the exercise of authority.
No matter where it happens, at the seat of government, or the seat of religion,
at the dinner table in your home or behind the wheel,
there is always talking,
and after awhile, some of us who find ourselves being "talked to" all the time
stop listening, and in this there is great danger.

It seems to me that one of the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of listening -
a little more involved, a little more important than "hearing",
it is part of the gift of Understanding and Wisdom.
The image of the tongue, the tongue of fire, which artists have so quickly captured
ought someday to be followed by an image of the ear.
The miracle of the tongues takes us nowhere without the miracle of the ears.
They are both essential to make the Pentecost experience complete.

We are never going to have peace until we learn to listen:
listen to the cry of the poor,
listen to the anger of the oppressed,
listen to the pain of the sick who get no health care or medication,
listen to the silence of those treated unjustly,
listen to hearts of the lonely,
listen to the whispers of the old and abandoned who are no longer useful to us.
The gift of Peace Jesus wishes for us
will only find a home in the hearts of those who stop talking and start listening.
No Audio Available

Proverbs 8:22-31 + Romans 5:1-5 + John 16:12-15

Fr. Boyer

Understanding does not necessarily lead to prayerful contemplation or to participation in the Holy Trinity; but when we get right down to the truth of the matter, the Holy Trinity is about experience not about understanding. It is about what happens to us, not what we think about. It is about what we know from experience, not what we learn from textbooks or the internet. Explanations are less important than experience, and when it comes to God and matters of the divine or matters of revelation, this is never more the truth. It seems to me that this Feast is best celebrated without wordy explanations that leave us standing outside the locked gate of mystery, but rather with a quiet waiting and watching that prepares us for the gift of God's self giving and opens the way to realizing a union with God.

This experience of God, which is revealed to us in our faith, is an experience of relationship, not an experience of ideas. Out side of relationship, the Trinity, remains a mystery behind a locked gate; but from within relationships, it a gift that opens the way to a spirituality that is profoundly and authentically Trinitarian. Think of it in terms of the names:

"Father" is not God's proper name. Neither is "God".

"Father", "Son" and "Spirit" are names or words that point to relationships rather than who God is in God's fullness. They do not begin to tap nor express nor reveal the inexhaustible mystery of God. What they do is invite us IN. Those names are about relationships, relationships with us as much as with each other. They speak of the character of divine mystery, they speak of the One is beyond naming. We may not know God's name; but we certainly know what God is from the names we use: God is Love, and that love is found in relationship.

The Old Testament prepares us well for images of God as Father with many wonderful stories of many wonderful fathers - Father Abraham who offers what is most precious and most valuable, his own life in his son, as a gift to God, a father who gives away what nearest and earnest to him, his own flesh and blood, and because of his willingness, life is returned to him. And there is Father Jacob who pines for his beloved child who has been plotted against and betrayed by his own brothers and sold for silver. But the bonds between them are never broken even by age and by silent distance. Joseph the son rises to forgive his betrayers, his own brothers, and is reunited with his father. These are stories that help us to name God: "Father." The one who is above all naming.

There comes to us another story in the New Testament about relationships and Father and Sons when a Father with two sons again gives God a name out of his behavior in relationship. Contrary to the expected behavior and patriarchy of the time, this "Father" gives all his attention not to the first born who deserves all, but to the last born who deserves nothing. The image of Father is shaped again by Love in the face of need with a gift that is pure gift, not a gift that is reward.

In these stories that lead us into precious and tender treasure of our experience we begin to touch the truth of divine presence and find our place in the Trinity, find our place in this dynamic of love so powerful that it can rise about sin and death itself.

There are three dangers to know and to avoid by those who wish to enter into the mystery of the Trinity:

Individualism - the more we try to be different, to separate ourselves from human nature and other people, the further we get from the Trinity. It is a strange and awful power to arrange the world around us for our own interests, to become competitive. The pursuit of private interests is always at the expense of another and the detriment of community. It changes the world from a playground to a battlefield.

Materialism - it's a matter of wants, not of needs. It is a religious practice, materialism. There is no effort to justify wants, we just want more, more for all kinds and of every kind, because the more the better. We do not deny that there is a spiritual level, we simply do not get there. The result of materialism is devolution. When bears get near humans they go downhill. It is embarrassing to notice. They lose their wonderful hunting skills and dig in dumpsters. Following material instincts, humans do the same thing - they go downhill and end up digging in dumpsters.

Restlessness is the third danger. It's the "Been there done that" mind. In this mind, it doesn't matter what you're doing, just so long as you do something. Perpetual motion becomes an end in itself. We get like ants running here and there following the path of least resistance or the lure of the most attractive, avoiding problems and driven to something better with no goal or rest in sight.

A balance of individualism with community; materialism with spirituality, and restlessness with peace draws us into the mystery of the Trinity where in we shall discover who are to one another, who we are to God, and where we are for all eternity.

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Fr. Boyer

I want to speak this evening to parents and to Jordan's young friends.

To parents I bring the message of the Book of Revelation.

It tells of John's vision and brings strong words of encouragement and hope to those who have been called in faith to bear witness in times of trial and distress.

Yours is a lofty calling, and holy vocation.

Parenting is a share in the Joy of God's creative Love.

It is also a share in the sorrow of God's sacrificial Love.

God, the divine parent knows the pain of loss and love.

You are called to share in God's life that no one else can know.

By love you have, by God's favor brought life to human flesh.

By faith you have consecrated that life bringing your children to Baptism.

And by your own faith, you reveal to them the face of God.

This is your vocation, your calling, your destiny, your purpose in God's plan.

To Jordan's friends I bring the message of the Gospel.

You are given to Jesus.

You are what the Father has given to his Son,

and you are precious in God's sight and the treasure of Jesus.

He calls you to himself when the world would keep you from him.

He speaks to that world and says: "Let the children, let the young, come to me."

The power of this Gospel proclaims that not one of you will be lost.

Not one of you.

One mistake does not bring condemnation.

One tragic moment of confusion does not keep one from Jesus,
from the life he brings, and the love he promises.

The very heart of the Catholic Faith that Jordan shared
is forgiveness and mercy.

Forgiveness is our calling and our mission,

and Mercy is our message and our hope.

The whole life of Jesus led him to one moment of Mercy,

and the whole of the Gospel is summed up in one of his final words:

"Father forgive them."

The power of that forgiveness is the only power that can bring peace.

It is God who speaks to us tonight in this holy place.

It is God who speaks words of Wisdom and words of Comfort.

to parents and to their children.

It does no good for God to speak if we do not listen

quiet our hearts and open our lives to His Word,

a word that has become flesh for us in Jesus Christ.

On the night before he died for us, Jesus gathered his loved ones
and made Covenant with them around a table.

He took bread and said the blessing

He took a cup and gave thanks,

He broke that bread and shared that cup,
and told his disciples to Do This in His Memory.

Since that night, it has been the custom of his disciples
to remember him in that way,
and in doing so, they remember each other.

This is the table where we shall gather tomorrow to remember
Jesus and bind ourselves in that Covenant.

This is the table where we shall gather tomorrow to remember
Jordan who by Baptism was made One with her Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ.

Overwhelmed with sorrow we come to this holy place
and bring what remains of Jordan Nelson,
her earthly body, our memories,
and the faith we have shared with her.

We praise our God this night

for the Joy we have shared in Jordan's life,

brief as it has been,

and we take comfort in the knowledge that the life Jesus Christ
was brief as well.

It is not the length of our days that matters in the sight of God,
but how much we have come to be like His Son,
in forgiveness, in love, and in Mercy.

No Audio Available

120

Funeral for Jordan Nelson

6/7/2004

Lamentations 3:22-26 + Romans 5:15 + John 11:32-38,40

Fr. Boyer

"If you believe you will see the glory of God."

A grieving Jesus standing among his most intimate friends speaks these words.

He has been guest in their home.

He has taken their reproach, their complaint,
and with his own broken heart, stands among them.

This is the Jesus whose company we share today,
and it is his promise that we hear today.

"If you believe you will see the glory of God."

We know the rest of the story.

Byron didn't need to read it all, just get it started so that we can live its conclusion.

Those two sisters, Martha and Mary, they are all of us:

the active busy ones of us and the passive listeners,

the movers and shakers

and the quiet ones who stay home and keep things together.

The talkers and the listeners, all companions of Jesus, receivers of his gifts.

We know the rest of the story.

They did believe, and they did see the glory of God.

But that glory was not the return of Lazarus

it was the resurrection of the dead Jesus.

The return of the dead Lazarus was simply a sign to awaken their faith and stir their hope, because Lazarus died again and the second time he stayed dead.

It is the death of Lazarus and the faith of his friends and family that really matter

not his coming out of the tomb. They already had faith in Jesus Christ before Jesus called Lazarus from that tomb. It is that faith which Paul describes to us today in Romans 5.

It is a faith that brings peace and grace,

a faith that lifts us up to stand in the glory of God.

It is that faith that sustains us in affliction and produces endurance.

That endurance, says Paul produces "character"

and "character" produces and sustains "Hope":

a hope that does not disappoint.

This liturgy today is about us and it is for us.

We are a people who have come out together like Martha and Mary,

complaining to the Lord about our loss,

wanting to know why He could not have done something,

and what we get is a Jesus still living in His church that simply shares this enormous grief and still speaks his words:

"If you believe you will see the glory of God."

We can dare to speak those words because we know that the love of God

has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

On Pentecost Sunday that same spirit was poured into Jordan's heart at her Confirmation.

To some of us it might bring confusion and wonder at why that Spirit did not bring her peace and courage.

Such questioning wonder is like the question and wonder of Mary in the Gospel who asks why Jesus did not come when first called.

For others more like Martha, there is simply the silence of presence standing upright in affliction with courage, and waiting to see the glory.

Today there is no end to this story either.

This is not the end of life, the end of Jordan's story or ours for that matter.

This can be the beginning of glory for those who hold in hope and in faith and stand with Jesus who is among us as one who weeps.

The Holy Spirit has been given to us.

The Love of God has been poured out among us, and we believe that Hope does not disappoint.

It is this Hope that keeps us alive in faith, alive in Love,

and leads us into glory on the day it shall come.

For as we just heard from the Book of Lamentations,

a Book of the Bible that knows and records more human suffering than any other,

"The favors of the Lord are not exhausted,

His mercies are not spent:

They are renewed each morning.

Good is the Lord to those who wait for him, and those who seek him.

It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord."

No Audio Available

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Body and Blood of Christ

6/13/2004

No Audio Available

122
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
6/20/2004

No Audio Available

123
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
6/27/2004

No Audio Available

124
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
7/4/2004

No Audio Available

125
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
7/11/2004

No Audio Available

126
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
7/18/2004

No Audio Available

127
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
7/25/2004

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Ecclesiastes 1:2,2:21-23 + Colossians 3:1-5,9-11 + Luke 12:13-21

Fr. Boyer

Several weeks ago, our church began to walk with Jesus toward to Jerusalem.

It was the Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary time, to be exact; and since then we are making our way through Luke's Gospel from Chapter Nine to Nineteen as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem. Along the way, in the genius of Luke's plan, Jesus instructs his disciples and forms them in the values of true discipleship. We pause today in that journey to hear a story about Jesus being drawn into a family dispute, and the discussion that comes from that dispute puts before would-be and wanna-be disciples a clear lesson on foolishness.

We are left to wonder about ourselves: how wise we are or how foolish. We are left to wonder about the power of greed, that constant yearning for more that creates false worth, and topples authentic priorities. We are called by Jesus to a kind of Wisdom that places value on who people are and what they can become rather than on what they have. This Gospel is about Wisdom, and those who would follow Jesus learn to be wise and find by that Wisdom true riches. Wisdom becomes the great treasure, the greatest wealth, the fondest possession.

The wise then stand in contrast to the foolish. The wise possess a reverent and respectful vision of the world that challenges narcissism, and the "me-first" foolishness that considers others only have one's own needs and wants have been satisfied. The wise know the truth about what they have and who they are. They never think that what they have should give them privilege, power, or influence. They always remember that privilege does not come without responsibility, and there are no rights in this life without duties.

There were some in that crowd who heard what Jesus said and surely grumbled. "There he goes again, warning us about our possessions. Why doesn't he talk about the law and keeping the Sabbath and sex like the other rabbis? Why doesn't he stick to religion and leave economic life to us who know more about it?" They were right, of course. He did talk more about the danger of wealth than anything else; and I think it's because in the course of one's life, more temptation and more harm come from failure here than anywhere else. Most of the people he spoke to and called into discipleship were not going to commit murder, adultery, or robbery. But everyday, they had to face the temptations of greed and selfishness. So, he did not exactly fit in, this pilgrim headed to Jerusalem with all it's wealth, power, and privilege. Along the way, he taught us about Wisdom; a kind of Gospel Wisdom that leaves us to stand in this world like foreigners who do not quite speak the local language. The language of consumption is not ours. The economics of power and privilege is not ours either.

This weekend and next, while walking with Jesus we get a chance to wonder about true Wisdom and the power of greed. Practically speaking it means the next time we walk through a store or through the mall and think of buying something, we might ask: Do I need this?

Those who are growing in Wisdom will ask the deeper and harder question:

"What will this do to me?"

"How will this affect my life, not today, but next month?"

"Is desire to have a sign of growing greed?"

“Am I really defined by what I own?”

“Am I just building bigger barns?”

“Am I Wise or am I a Fool?”

There are no foolish disciples of Jesus.

No Audio Available

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19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

8/8/2004

Wisdom 18:6-9 + Hebrews 11:1,8-19 + Luke 12:32-48

Fr. Boyer

Fear or Faith.

It is one or the other in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The story of fear opens the Old Testament

so that the story of faith can be told.

It begins with a couple who are afraid,

afraid of God, afraid to trust, afraid even to obey.

Their fear leads to violence, and one of their children kills the other.

It is a story told again and again in the human family.

Fear leads to violence.

That first story of fear however, leads to the next story of faith,
and we have heard something of it today so that we might better open our hearts
to the lesson Jesus offers us along the way of his journey.

That second story is again about a couple.

This time it is a couple of faith not of fear: Abraham and Sara.

They are the risk takers, who live by faith, not by fear.

Unafraid, Abraham leaves his homeland for a place he's never been.

Unafraid, old, and thinking they are finished with life;

they conceive life because they are not afraid.

Unafraid, trusting that God will provide all things, Abraham risks,

not just life in a new land, not just conceiving a child,

but he even risks that child in moment of faith

that is as much a test of God as it is a test of Abraham.

There is yet another story of faith to be told.

It is the story of our lives in this place, in this time.

It is a story shaped by the Rabbi, Jesus,

the one who teaches us during his journey how to make our own.

Each of us in here writes the verses of our story every day of our lives.

It is either a story of fear or of faith,

and our story like Abraham's will be illustrated by how we use what we have.

It will tell of our trust in God, and it will measure our faith.

If we are afraid to follow Christ, it will never be a story of faith.

If we are afraid to love, to give life, to accept God's gift, it will never be a story of faith.

If we fear to give up, do without, or give away anything in our lives because it is the right thing to do,
because God asks it of us, we shall not have story of faith.

In just a few moments we are going to stand and profess our faith.

Thirty minutes later when we leave, the rest of the world will know how much faith we have by how we
live the rest of the week.

The faith of Abraham, which is the faith of Jesus

is not a creed, a set of rules, dos and don'ts;

it is not a theological concept to be studied in books.
It is a relationship, a relationship to be lived.
This kind of relationship is what “love” means.
Different from affection, sexual attraction, and sentimentality,
this “Love” – God-style.
It is a gift in the context of a relationship that allows for risks in the face of fear.
It is what makes marriage a sacrament – a holy union,
because it rests upon faith that allows for no fear.
It is a love that lets two people set aside their fears and take the risk of forever.
The fear of the future, the fear of being a mother or a father,
the fear that they might find someone else and leave,
the fear that love might grow cold must be replaced by faith.

This is the faith Jesus calls forth from those who would be his disciples.
That is the faith that led him to Jerusalem and sustained him
through all that would happen there.
It is the faith we must have if we shall be with him in the New Jerusalem.
No Audio Available

130

Assumption of Mary

8/15/2004

Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6,10 + 1 Corinthians 15:20-27 + Luke 1:39-56

Fr. Boyer

The image of Mary and Jesus that we inherit from Luke's Gospel is radical and political.

They are people who live against the culture of their times.

To make a change in society, Jesus did not start at the top with Caesar or Pilate, or with the Sanhedrin in his religious structure.

He started with the poor, with sinners and outcasts inviting them to become a community dependent on God in faith.

They were to be a witness for the prevailing culture as a new way of life.

What this "church" was intended to do was bring about revolution of values.

It was not an attack on society, violent or non-violent;

but a transformation of the world by living in accord with the will of God.

This Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary is part of that transformation of values.

It is a deep and profound challenge to every society in every age.

It bears witness to any way of life that fails to see women with any value at all.

From the earliest generations of Christians, the place of Mary, the expression of her role in redemption, and even the names by which she is called

all bear witness to social, political, and religious values.

I suppose that every age of this life has thought at one time or another that it was at the ultimate moment of transformation or of crises;

and I suspect that we have every right to think the same.

The cyber age in which we live has brought a new level of degradation for women (and men as well) as pornography spills into every cable and computer screen of the world. But that is only a western world phenomenon.

The plight of women everywhere in the world seems to be at a new low.

In our little bubble of reality, it may seem as though there is progress as more and more women find their way into corporate Board Rooms and political power.

But we live in a bubble here in the western world.

The conditions in which most women of the rest of world live are surely as bad as they have ever been.

Any feast of or celebration of Mary the Mother of God speaks to the values of the feminine. The Gospel we proclaim today: words, which Luke places in the mouths of Elizabeth and Mary is about a transformation of societies values. These gospel words are nothing short of revolutionary! Perhaps that is why we might call them "Good News."

It trivializes the person of Mary and her role in God's plan to sentimentalize her into a quiet little homemaker or gentle, young widow.

These are not the words of a passive little girl who lives her life as a victim of political power and religious oppression.

These are radical suggestions from the mouth of a woman who is symbolically the very image of the church itself.

These words call into question every institution, culture, and society

that does not honor, respect, treasure, and protect women.

Mary was a woman who was privy to the power of God as no man.

To honor her and not honor all women

is an intolerable contradiction of God's will.

To light candles, sing songs, and treasure her image as artists in every age have provided while looking the other way, or keeping silent in the face of the oppression and the degradation of any woman

is a mockery of what we are doing in every church this weekend with this feast.

Our prayer in here today must be for women everywhere in this world who have lived this day without respect and honor.

Our communion today in the Body of Christ must be with those women in a commitment to no longer look the other way or be silent,

for her song has become our own.

"Cast down the mighty from their thrones....

"Fill the hungry with good things.....

No Audio Available

131
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
8/22/2004

No Audio Available

Sirach 3:17-29 + Hebrews 12:18-24 + Luke 14:7-14

Fr. Boyer

The first reading this weekend guides us through another reflection from the lesson Jesus gives to those who would be his disciples during this Jerusalem journey.

Remember, Jesus himself was schooled in rich tradition of Wisdom.

Ben Sira wrote first in Hebrew, and his grandson translated the work into Greek.

It was a summary of Hebrew tradition written to keep the faith alive among those who were in exile, isolated from their roots and Hebrew companions.

The Greeks had no specific word for "Humility."

Every one of their words that related to the idea

had some sense of passivity, weakness, or feebleness.

The Greeks regarded the whole idea of humility as a weakness, and they held it in contempt.

In contrast to that culture's perception, Ben Sira would have Hebrews see humility is a virtue, a strength to be cultivated in life as a way of drawing near to truth.

In fact, as time passed, the prophets began to use that virtue in their description of the Messiah. Even in the psalms, virtuous people are described as being humble, and the evidence of humility is trust in God, knowing that God is the source of all greatness.

The Jesus of Luke's Gospel, headed for Jerusalem has already put his trust in God. He is man entirely in touch with the truth of who he is and who God is.

Still in contrast to the idea of humility the Greeks proposed, Jesus shows us that this strength, this virtue, this quality of a disciple's life is an active, positive, cooperative trust solidly set upon hope in God.

Jesus and his disciples know the truth about themselves and their God.

They know who they are and what they are.

They know where they are,

and they simply embrace the truth of their trust and hope in God.

The illustration of this that Jesus uses speaks to guests and to hosts.

He proposes a social system without reciprocity.

That divine suggestion flies in the face of most of what we do and why.

Jesus proposes for disciples behavior that is fit for the Kingdom of God.

In the Kingdom, God is the host, and everyone is invited.

Behavior in that Kingdom finds everyone seated together.

There is a leveling of the things that separate people.

Only those stand out who think they are different or better than another.

The humble find their sense of self and their identity in God, not in comparison with another like themselves.

This is a very important thing for disciples of Jesus to understand.

The consequence of finding one's identity in God is service, not power.

There is no one freer in the entire world than the humble.
They do not cling to fame or fortune,
because they know that these things
stifle depth and growth in wisdom and in holiness.

Luke suggests in the words of Jesus,
that humility is not pretending that one is “not worthy.”
Humility is facing the truth that all is gift,
and the only proper attitude is not pride, nor arrogance, nor feeling special;
but simply Gratitude.

Luke suggests that the proud think they are worth more
because of their achievements, their status, their power, their wealth,
all of which they may have; but the proud miss the point.
All that stuff is for the service of others and nothing else.

The people around the humble table are people who in truth, need to be there.
We who have set ourselves on the road to Jerusalem as disciples of Jesus
never forget the truth that all this stuff we have is not ours,
and we are not better than anyone because of it.
We cannot ever forget that what we have is there
because we have been chosen by God to be instruments of God’s love,
of God’s mercy, and of God’s goodness.
This is the truth that bears fruit in Humility.
This is the virtue of a disciple, and it is how disciples of Jesus will be known.
No Audio Available

133

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/5/2004

Wisdom 9:13-18 + Philemon 9:10-17 + Luke 14:25-33

Fr. Boyer

The class on discipleship continues, but there is a turn in the mood today.

Luke describes the scene suggesting that "great crowds" were traveling with Jesus; and he says that Jesus turned and addressed them.

That "turning" is important.

It is a visual detail that puts Jesus up front as the leader, the teacher, the guide.

They are going to Jerusalem, but that crowd does not get the picture.

His words sound harsh and impatient, and they may very well have been.

What he has to say to them today however is not about family relationships or carrying crosses.

In the examples Luke provides

we get some help to understand what Jesus means.

In a word, this is all about Prudence.

Jesus counsels would-be disciples to be Prudent.

It is a quality of good moral living.

The quality of a prudent life is marked by action that is wise, well considered, responsible, reasonable, and accountable.

These are qualities of action.

Passive, timid, and negligent people are not found to be prudent, and they have no place among the disciples of Jesus.

Prudence seeks the best way to do the right thing.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are not timid, inactive, passive, and negligent.

They will be leaders: people who do the right thing,

not managers who do things right.

It is not the same thing, and we know the difference when we see it.

Disciples of Jesus have the big picture.

They have considered the consequences of their decisions and their actions.

They do not live in their own little world unconnected to others.

They never forget that what they say and what they do has something to do with the "common good", a concept that seems to be slipping away from us.

The truly Prudent do not live isolated lives in which self interest is all that matters.

The truly Prudent disciple of Jesus "calculates"

(to use a word of this Gospel in the example of the builder).

The truly Prudent disciple of Jesus "sits down and decides"

(emphasis upon a good decision that affects others: since he is talking about the life and death of his troops in this example).

This virtue of "prudence" becomes more a quality of life than a kind of rehearsed behavior.

It is a way of living in relationship to others.
It is an ability of see how things fit together,
to see that there is a divine plan for goodness.

Prudent people are accountable people.
They do not forget that they shall be called upon
to account for what they do in this life
so that what they are will be consistent with what they do.

The call to renounce possessions at the end of this text today
is one more part of the call to experience discipleship
as stewardship and the challenge to use with prudence the things we have
not to get more, but to give more.

That crowd following Jesus to Jerusalem was probably there to see what they could get without the
least bit of interest in what they would be called upon to give.

Having heard what Jesus says today, it cannot be the same for us.
We shall have no excuse for any behavior that is self-serving
and fails to find the way to do the right thing.
No Audio Available

134

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/12/2004

Exodus 32:7-14 + 1 Timothy 1:12-17 + Luke 15:1-32

Fr. Boyer

Another lesson in the ways of discipleship as Jesus walks to Jerusalem comes in a story all too familiar.

It provides another of the qualities of discipleship, but it is easily missed by a people who are more interested in the one who runs away than in the those who stay home.

The is not about the children.

It is about the parent.

Luke would have us understand this

by quickly adding the two parables that follow the long one.

Left to ourselves we might like to think that this long story is about us; finding a welcome,

receiving unconditional forgiveness,

coming to our senses,

knowing where our true home is to be found.

But, it is not about any of that.

At least not until we have explored entirely the people who stay home.

In that sense, it is about us,

about you and me who have not run away, who are not big sinners,

who have not yet squandered our inheritance

even though we may take risks with it now and then.

For people who want to be disciples of Jesus, the virtue, or quality of discipleship is found in the Father of this first story

made all the more obvious by the behavior and attitude of the older son.

Yet this parable always tempts us to comfort ourselves

rather than challenge ourselves.

We want it to be about forgiveness received

rather than hear it as a lesson in forgiven;

but there is no way around the placement of this story on the road to Jerusalem.

It is about disciples and how they are to behave, what they ought to feel,

and how they should treat one another.

The disciple of Jesus Christ waits for and anxiously anticipates the opportunity to forgive. There is no hint of blame nor thought of punishment.

There is only a burning desire to restore what is lost,

to heal what is broken,

and to RUN, not walk toward anyone who has turned toward us.

That father never gave up his hope nor his desire to have his children together.

That father never said those deadly words:

"He'll never change." or, "That's just the way he is."

Those words betray an attitude of judgement that freezes out the other,
and they justify giving up hope, when there is no reason to do so.

The heart hardened by such judgements is not the heart of a disciple of Jesus.

Stubbornness, anger, self-righteousness, and arrogance in the face of human weakness are not qualities
of disciples of Jesus making their way to Jerusalem.

Those disciples will always be on the lookout, and always be vigilant for every opportunity to extend the
mercy of God and the embrace of God

not just to the deserving, but also to those who some would think will never change, never be worthy,
nor ever find their way home.

As disciples of Jesus we must be reconcilers as much as reconciled.

All three parables today focus on celebration

and that celebration is why we are here.

Yet it rarely looks and feels much like such a celebration

because we are still too good at pointing the finger of blame

and fail to open our arms in embrace.

This noble virtue of mercy is out of our reach if it is only found in God.

The call to discipleship is a call to mercy, forgiveness, peace;

but it is not a call to accept them nearly as much as it is a vocation to give them.

When that happens on this earth, the party will have begun.

No Audio Available

135
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
9/19/2004

Fr. Mollan

No Audio Available

136

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/26/2004

Amos 6:1-7 + 1 Timothy 6:11-16 + Luke 16:19-31

Fr. Boyer

This story found only in Luke's Gospel does not invite us in nearly as much as it invites us to observe.

The lesson here for us comes from looking and learning, not from trying to identify with either the rich man or with Lazarus.

A close look at the context of the story suggests that this is more about compassion than about wealth or poverty.

The trouble here is that the rich man because of his passion for wealth has no passion for justice, and so, Lazarus suffers.

In the midst of this Gospel passage are words easily missed because the images are so powerful; but these words of verse 31 carry the message to those who seek to become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

He speaks these words to those who are still with him, to those who have heard what he said about possessions, about mercy, about forgiveness.

"If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead."

The Jewish tradition which shaped the conscience of Jesus of Nazareth was a powerful social message.

It was not simply about "doing good and avoiding evil."

It was not simply a matter of "keeping the rules".

There was more to be done.

Disciples of Jesus today must be moved by the same social message from the Scriptures that shaped Jesus himself.

Otherwise, all his words will fall upon deaf ears.

It is the indifference that condemns the rich man, not his wealth.

It is his failure to see what is right in front of his face that costs him his eternal life.

It is his failure to hear and be moved by the word of God - by the Prophets and by Moses himself that completes this tragic story.

Indifference will never be found in a disciple of Jesus.

His word and his deeds stir the disciple with a Passion for Justice that will not allow any Lazarus anywhere be dismissed or ignored.

Social action and social responsibility will be virtues that mark disciples on their way to Jerusalem.

The compassion found in these disciples is not just a gentle concern or nice contribution to charity.

It is an absolute PASSION, a driving, powerful, unmistakable, uncontainable

thirst for Justice that will show itself in more powerful and more convincing ways than simply in good works and contributions.

Those certainly will be there, but this thirst and hunger for Justice will not be satisfied by contributions of time and money.

It will be a force for change, not just in one's own way of using one's possessions, but in the very systems themselves that leave Lazarus at the gate begging day after day until he finally dies in that misery.

Compassion is a radical criticism of a system that produces hurt and tolerates it.

It announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, and is never to be accepted as a normal or natural condition for being human.

Compassion is a recognition of the human community that jerks us out of our comfortable self absorbed ways of living and seeing things.

Compassion sparks our awareness of others, and as soon as we are awakened by it and move to action,

Jesus enters into the hurt and our passion becomes redemptive within his.

Compassion will never be "conservative" if it is the compassion of Christ.

It will be generous, extravagant, and inclusive.

It is an unmistakable mark of people on the way to Jerusalem in the company of Jesus Christ.

Audio Available

137

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/3/2004

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4 + 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14 + Luke 17:5-10

Fr. Boyer

The plea of the apostles: "Increase our faith." almost overshadows the rest of these gospel verses in which Jesus shares his vision of the great reversal that will be found when the reign of God begins. Perhaps those apostles were beginning to catch on.

We have skipped over some heavy stuff between last week's Gospel and today's.

There was serious instruction on the gravity of causing another to sin, and on the necessity for forgiving others.

With that behind them, and the vision Jesus proposes ahead of them, it is not surprising that these disciples cry out.

As always, they fall into the trap of thinking that more is better, and in a sense, the response of Jesus is to suggest

that the quality of their faith is more important than the quantity.

However, it is this vision and the challenge of the great reversal that deeply disturbs these apostles and gives them reason to acknowledge their need for Faith.

A master and a slave are put before us with the suggestion that when the reign of God begins, the roles shall be reversed. How you feel about that certainly depends on whether you see yourself as master or as slave. If you are living the life of a slave, the reign of God will come with relief and the joy of finally being at rest and being served by others. If you are living the life of the master, the reign of God will come with some surprises that might be a bit unpleasant.

The vision of Jesus gives us reason to join in the cry of the apostles. When this Gospel is proclaimed in the western world, in "developed" nations of wealth and power, it speaks to people who are accustomed to being the "masters." Most of what we have and want is available to us because the master/slave distinction is still working to our advantage. Talk of peace in this part of the world, and visions of peace are nothing more than a silly fantasy if we fool ourselves into thinking that "peace" means that everyone stop fighting and go back to work. What Jesus proposes is that the reign of God, which is the only real peace we can hope for, will come when that master/slave distinction is finished and we all sit down at the table of God's bounty together. Prayers for peace when answered may not find us in power, in control, or having all the wealth and stuff money can buy.

When we pray for the Kingdom to come, we ought to give serious thought about how this might happen and what it may look like. It is probable that we may have less in order for others to have more. In order for most of the world to be fed, we might not be able to have three cars, or maybe even two. In order for there to be a roof over every head every night, we might not be able to have six or seven empty rooms in our homes.

I believe that the apostles were beginning to get the point, and thoughts like these were beginning to go through their minds. They were beginning to see that the reign of God was going to be different than they had thought.

Now they lived in a world and with a faith that held to the notion that wealth and power, doing good works and avoiding evil brought merit and somehow could get more good things out of God. They really did believe that God owed them rewards for being "good." The news Luke has to share is that there is

no special merit to be had from simply doing what is commanded. Keeping the rules is not enough, and God doesn't owe us anything.

That Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk suggests that we must live by faith if we are to live the vision, and so we might well join the prayer of the apostles.

The increase we need however lies in richness and depth; a faith rooted in hope, and able to endure in the face of suffering and delay.

We pray for a faith grounded on the bedrock of fortitude, a source of strength when we might be tempted to grow weary, and losing heart, yield to the "spirit of cowardice" that Timothy warns us against.

We pray for a faith that will lead us into the mysterious ways of God's Holy Wisdom no matter how dark and winding the path may seem.

That kind of faith will open us to be transformed by grace and begin to share in the vision of Jesus: a vision that sees us as servants, slaves;

people who use what they have for the service of the Master, rather than for the privilege of having even more.

Less concerned with having more,

we might then be focused on what to do with what we have.

When that begins, we will have faith enough to see ourselves into the reign of God.

Audio Available

138
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time
10/10/2004

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

Exodus 17:8-13 + 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2 + Luke 18: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

It is about prayer, but in the mind of Luke, it is also about justice.

The two are not separated, and in the context of our instructions about the qualities of a disciple during this Journey to Jerusalem, we ought to perk up and pay attention.

The widow of this parable gives us more than a lesson on persistence.

She teaches not just how to pray, but also what to pray.

Nameless as she is in the context of this Gospel,

she becomes symbolic, not just of the poor, but symbolic of the church itself. Disciples of Jesus (that's the church) learn from the Master

that perseverance in prayer is important,

and that injustice is not to remain where disciples live.

This instruction by Jesus to those who would be His disciples

insists that we do not just persevere in prayer, but also that we cry out for justice.

Those who believe in Jesus will do so.

Those who would follow Jesus to Jerusalem will not leave things the way they are.

If we are to be disciples of Jesus,

then we cannot be like children playing at home or at school.

We cannot know what is right and fail to speak up when something is wrong.

We cannot blame a "system" because we are the system.

We cannot say: "That's just the way things are."

because it is our silence that keeps things that way.

God calls believers to speak up and put themselves on the line.

It was not easy for that widow to stand again and again before that judge,

but she would not be silent while there was injustice.

Besides, who knows about him?

I wonder sometimes if his change of heart

was not more than simply being worn out.

Perhaps, he was tired of being part of a system of injustice,

and in his heart he thought, "It's not fair. I am going to do something about it."

I wonder as well if we might not benefit

from shaking up the usual way of hearing this parable.

Perhaps we should switch sides and listen to again

with us as the judge and God as the woman.

It would be a little like the parable of the unjust steward

who is clever enough to manipulate his master's debts to give himself a comfortable retirement.

In switching roles here, God would be the one who implores,

who will not give up, who continues to persist in calling us to justice.

With the hope that even if we are not moved by the right motives,

the coming of God's Reign, we might respond simply out of awareness that it will give us some relief!

However we hear this parable,
the joining of persistent prayer and the cry for justice are not to be separated.
It is not the nature of our God to turn away from injustice whether it be personal/individual acts or systemic injustice in cultures, economies, and politics.
We pray again and again, day in and day out the words:
"Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done....."
The greatest obstacle to the coming of God's Reign among us is Injustice.
The Church has spoken again and again of this.
The Holy Father has said it aloud in the United Nations.
True and Lasting Peace comes only when there is Justice.
Then all people know the benevolent God who reveals His love for us.
Then all people will have a just and fair share of God's gifts
and the resources of this earth.

This is the image of the Reign of God Luke proposes to us.
To disciples on the Way to the New Jerusalem, God comes along
nagging, pestering, urging, pleading, and crying out to us for Justice.
It seems to me that the sooner we make Justice a priority in our lives and in our prayer, the sooner our prayers shall be answered, and the Kingdom will Come.
Audio Available

140

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/24/2004

Sirach 35:12-14,16-18 + 2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18 + Luke 18:9-14

Fr. Boyer

The Lukan lesson on prayer continues this Sunday.

Last week in a story about a widow and a judge we were invited to consider how to pray and what to pray.

This week, two men give us almost a caricature of prayer with which we can examine our own.

The difference between these two is very subtle, and we must tune in to the Old Testament reading to pick it up.

We are set up by our culture to approve one of these two and scorn the other, but what if we knew a little more about them.....

Suppose on the way to the Temple that morning the Pharisee took groceries to a family where no one had a job, stopped to see someone recently left alone by death of a spouse, and picked up a street person and took them to a shelter, leaving some cash to help feed them.

Suppose at the same time, the Publican

on his way to the temple evicted a single parent from some of his rental property because they were late on rent,

had a huge breakfast and left no tip after being rude and demanding to the server, and on the way into the Temple dropped in only some loose change from his pocket at the offering plate.

With these considerations our first impressions begin to fail, as well they should.

The issue here is the comparison.

This is that trap in the story that catches us by surprise and teaches us a lesson.

It was a surprise for those who first heard this story from Jesus too.

A surprise twist that leaves you thinking is the whole point of parable telling.

The point here is not that we should pray one way or the other, that one prayer is bad and another is good, or that God hears one prayer but not another.

This was a problem for the early church that formed this Gospel.

They prayed differently than the Jews, and Luke would suggest that comparison and judgment about one being better than the other was useless.

We might do well to get the same message.

Where the prayer of the Pharisee goes wrong not in thanking God or acknowledging what he has become by God's grace; but in comparing himself to another.

It is the word: "Like" that betrays something out of order.

With that word, he crosses the line from gratitude to comparison.

It is a subtle difference, but we know how it feels.

Suppose we could listen in to the prayers of some who are here this morning:

"Thank God I am not like that one over there who sings off key."
"Thank God I am not like that liberal who is destroying the church."
"Thank God I am not like that conservative trying to relive the past that never was."
"Thank God I am not like those lazy people on welfare stealing my reluctant tax money."
You see, it is just like the Temple scene,
and all these thoughts betraying a deep insecurity.
The trouble here is that this kind of person, like the Pharisee,
does not know how to deal with God except by comparing himself to others.
For all his faults, the Publican at least has the integrity to look only at himself.
He knew who he was.
He never said, "I'm sorry I am not as good as or "like" the Pharisee.

It does not matter how we compare in the end.
What matters is that we know ourselves and who we really are within.
Because it is God who saves, and God is after us all.
The Publican went home "justified."
Not because he went to the Temple.
Not because his prayer was better than someone else's.
He went home justified because he knew that he could not justify himself,
and he was honest about his imperfect self.
We have no idea where the Pharisee went.
Perhaps he went on trying to justify himself or impress God further by other good deeds so that God
might not let anything bad happen to him.
That's the way it often goes with that kind of prayer and attitude --
a sort "Divine Bribery" that will see faith and prayer collapse if some tragedy occurs. They think, after all,
"I've been so good. I've done so much. How could God do this to me?"
Wrong thinking here.
Jesus might well have had the same thoughts if His prayer and relationship to God had gone that way.

Our clue to the understanding of this parable comes in the First reading from Sirach. "The Lord is a God
of justice, who knows no favorites.....
Who we are in the sight of God has nothing to do with anyone else.
God cannot, will not, and does compare us to one another.
But God will look for signs of His Son in us.
Audio Available

141

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/31/2004

Wisdom 11:22-12:2 + 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2 + Luke 19:1-10

Fr. Boyer

Nineteen Sundays ago on June 27 Chapter 9 verse 51 of this Gospel said that Jesus:

"resolutely set his face to journey to Jerusalem."

I was sick that Sunday, less than two weeks out of open heart surgery, and in spite of how miserable I felt, you will never know how much I wanted to be here, because these nineteen Sundays are probably the most powerful and significant pieces in the Sunday readings for the whole three-year cycle.

I am sorry to put them down today, not just because next month we get the dire and difficult themes of pre-advent warnings and awakenings; but also because we have hardly begun to reach into the depths of what Luke has to offer in this unique Journey narrative from chapter nine to nineteen.

Be that as it may, we're moving on; and today comes a story that is unique to Luke and sums up all the qualities of discipleship we have considered the past nineteen weeks.

Unfortunately, we did not get the story that comes just before these verses, and it is important; because Luke is using a contrast here to make his point. Just before this story begins in chapter 18, we get the sad tale of the rich official.

He was law-abiding and upright, but he could not do the one thing that Jesus asked. When challenged to sell what he had and give it to the poor and come follow Jesus, the rich man became very sad, for he was very rich.

What was supposed to make his life wonderful, secure, and comfortable became an obstacle for his future.

Jesus never went to his house.

Then Luke gives us this tale of a man who was not law-abiding, not respected, selfish, unjust, and motivated by one thing: having more of everything.

And as the tale is told, you can almost hear the murmuring.

That crowd; judgmental, aloof, full of themselves, and so much better than this short, arrogant, independent, crook whose wealth has come by his clever, unjust, and ambitious cooperation with the Romans.

Their jealousy is almost palatable, and then the final blow: Jesus comes to his house, not theirs.

They are so close to Jerusalem, so close to the end of the journey, so near to that ultimate and longed for friendship with Jesus.

There is one thing in the way, and Zacchaeus figures it out while the others are too busy with the murmuring.

There is a sequence in this story, a movement we must not miss.

There are steps to be taken by those who want to hear what Zacchaeus heard and have the joy and salvation he came to receive.

The first step is wanting to see Jesus and being willing to go looking.

In the second step, Zacchaeus makes changes in his life:

changes that restore justice and set things right that were wrong.

Do you notice that Jesus never asked that of him?

Zacchaeus already knew what was needed - he had been listening.

He knew what was keeping him from Joy, and from salvation.
When there is justice, there Jesus is to be found.
There he will stay.
That does not happen until justice is done and the wrong has been set right.
The Jesus of Luke's Gospel is still looking, and he stands in our midst today.
The risk and the foolishness of being like those who murmur is great
and the consequences are tragic.
We should listen to this story with the memory of the one that goes before.
We are either like one or like the other,
the rich man who went away sad, or Zacchaeus who went home with Joy.
The difference between them was the issue of justice and stewardship
As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the one who is sought becomes the one who seeks.
He turns to those who seek him,
looking for a place to stay,
and Zacchaeus shows us how to make him welcome.
Audio Available

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32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
11/7/2004

Dcn. Byron

No Audio Available

143

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

11/14/2004

Malachi 3:19-20 + 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 + Luke 21:5-19

Fr. Boyer

We are living among ruins.

The ruins of political systems, of formerly revered social structures, and the ruins of economic well-being, of dreams and aspirations.

It is impossible to imagine anyone in this church not having found themselves or their lives in ruins at least once.

There is no place on this earth where human beings dwell that does not have its ruins. It is not necessary to live at the time Luke wrote this Gospel to know about ruins. Ruined temples, wars, natural disasters, rejection by family and friends, persecutions:

these things go on all the time, in every age.

The idea that these things signify the end of time has an appeal

if for no other reason than to release us from the obligation of doing anything about it. That kind of thinking is the easy way out.

If after all, the end is really near, why bother to rebuild, restore, forgive, or expect anything else.

The temptation to dig a hole, lock the doors, hide inside, or deny it all is considerable. But that is not our option, at least, not the option of people whose lives are rooted in Jesus Christ.

There is actually a greater crisis than all of those disasters.

The one we really face here in Norman, Oklahoma is, in most cases, the converse of what Jesus foresaw.

Our crisis is that nothing is happening.

It is all someone else's problem somewhere else in the world.

We did not drive around any tanks or armored vehicles to get here.

No one dodged any bullets, and there's no wall being built under the pretense of security.

I've never buried anyone who was killed for their faith.

This temple does not seem to be under any threat from a foreign army of occupation.

Precisely because nothing seems to be happening faithful people are tempted by spiritualities and religious experiences that offer drama and entertainment.

The temptation to make religion a market commodity,

to shop around for the most convenient schedule,

to pick and choose what to believe and how to shape one's values

with the least amount of challenge, conversion, or change is highly seductive.

It's as though we find a religion that fits us, rather than fitting ourselves into faith.

We stand in need of the same counsel Jesus gave his disciples before:

beware of being led astray, trust God, endure the boredom and emptiness that besiege us.

To the sick he says the same thing: "Your Faith will Save you." Be strong, Endure.

The words of Jesus are sprinkled with obstinate hope

that contradict bleak surroundings and threats of disaster.

The most constant recurring theme in the Gospel of Luke is: "Do Not Fear."

Prophets, trembling shepherds, faltering apostles hear those words again and again.

We are not promised escape.

We are promised that there is Life without end.

Endurance is not a passive state.

It is a deliberate act, a choice to rely on God's promise.

There is no denying death, adversity, pain, sorrow, or disasters,
but these are not reason to give up. We are a people who look at life with hope.
That means, God is in charge, Providence rules the universe,
the world has been redeemed no matter how badly we mess it up
or what evil we do. We cannot finally destroy the goodness of life.

The virtue that emerges from this Gospel is Hope.

It is not the same as a wish. Those are based on flights of fancy.

Wishes may or may not come true, but God fulfills all hope.

Hope is based on a promise.

Jesus Christ wished he didn't have to die,

but he had no real hope of avoiding the cross.

So, instead of wishing, he hoped. He hoped that his Father would keep his promise
by making something beautiful of his ugly death.

His hope was fulfilled beyond all imagination by his resurrection.

My friends, we hope because Jesus promised he would stay with us
wherever we go, whatever we do.

The sick and the frail among us who will shortly be anointed
must take courage from this gospel.

They live among us as unmistakable signs of hope.

They remind us of what the stakes are in this life as we come of age.

In our generation we can no longer confuse ignorance with bigotry,
blame poverty on laziness, excuse war as a last resort

any more than we can say that the sick are ill because of something their parents did. That thinking
comes from another age.

Today we are people who live without fear,

not in hiding from the challenges of love, fidelity, and commitment,

not shopping around for entertainment or the easy way out,

but joyfully embracing Hope because Jesus remains true to his word,

and by endurance and perseverance, we shall secure our lives.

Audio Available

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Christ the King

11/21/2004

2 Samuel 5:1-3 + Colossians 1:12-20 + Luke 23:35-43

Fr. Boyer

We come now to the end of Luke's Gospel year, and the ultimate end of the journey Jesus has made to Jerusalem.

Now we know where he was leading us.

It is not to the city of the old covenant and temple, but outside the city.

It was not to the seat of proud power, but to the posture of humble service.

He took us no throne room with riches and comforts,
but to a cross with its loneliness and suffering.

Yet from the throne of his cross he spoke his finest words
and delivered the most clear summary of his mission.

It is Luke's summary of all that began in the Nazareth Synagogue
as Jesus stood up, took the scroll and began to read.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor
to proclaim liberty to captives,
recovery of sight to the blind
and freedom for the oppressed,
to proclaim a year of favor from God."

In the genius of Luke's writing, we see now that it is all complete.

The Jesus he gives us has done what he set out to do right up to and including his very last breath.

All his life he reached out to those who were outside, at the edges of life, the sinners, the tax collectors, the women, children, those without hope, and in his last breath, he does it one more time. He includes a condemned thief among those who will inherit His life and His relationship with His Father. No one who looks to Him will be without Hope and without a place before His Father.

What he proclaims in that Nazareth Synagogue comes as welcome news to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. The trouble lies in the last proclamation: "A Year of Favor From God."

This is what I like to call: "Bible Speak". It is a kind of very specific biblical language that refers to what is required in the book of Leviticus chapter 25: a Jubilee year every seventh year requiring the land to rest in order to restore its fertility, and every fifty years the Israelites were to restore their relationships with one another. It meant that they were to free slaves who were imprisoned for unpaid debts. It was all about forgiveness, righting relationships, and restoring the community to equality before God.

For a people who are more interested in what they call "justice" rather than forgiveness, this is a very unwelcome and difficult suggestion.

For a people who hold whole nations in debt with an economic system that keeps nations poor, a "Year of Favor" and not getting your money back with interest does not sound like a good idea.

For a people who would rather exact revenge and punish rather than forget and forgive, such a "Year of Favor" is seems like an insult and unfair.

None the less, the Year of Favor has been proclaimed by Jesus Christ from the Synagogue of Nazareth, and it was not a twelve-month year - it was and is another way of describing the Reign of God, the "Kingdom" of Jesus Christ.

Citizens of that realm, those who choose life in "Jubilee" or in "Favor" will be setting things right these days.

They will forgive debts.

They will see to the freedom of those who are captive, not just in prisons,

but those who are captive in economic and social systems that exploit them and hold them in bondage.

They will see that relationships are healed and restored to goodness by kindness.

Those who recognize their need for the Kingdom, or that year of Favor and the chosen ones, are kin of God.

The one who speaks the loudest in today's Gospel is one who knows what is to come. In asking Jesus to "remember" him, he asks for the relationship to continue:

a relationship that brings the promise of forgiveness and paradise.

The thief wants a relationship with one who is innocent yet suffers, one who is abandoned, alone, helpless, powerless, betrayed, and misunderstood.

He knows something many of us are yet to learn.

He knows there is no future for him, and no hope to be found from those who are comfortable, connected, and in charge.

Those of us who can identify with him and make his prayer our own and those who hang on the crosses of their own lives or live with the painful consequences of their choices as he did, have every hope of hearing that final and power filled promise: "You will be with me in paradise."

Audio Available

145

1st Sunday of Advent

11/28/2004

Isaiah 21: 1-5 + Romans 13:11-14 + Matthew 24:37-44

Fr. Boyer

Jesus stands with his disciples on the Mount of Olives.

It is not a "mountain" by our measure.

It is just a hill that rises up out of the Kedron Valley.

To the west is the hill upon which Jerusalem is built.

It is not as far as from here to Robinson Street.

In fact the distance is made greater because the road twists and turns as it goes down and up. You can hear the noise of the city from the Mount of Olives.

There Jesus sees the Temple in all its grandeur and power, and he makes his prophecy.

It was really more of an educated guess than a real surprisingly new idea about the future.

The country was occupied by a hostile military power, and there was opposition and resistance that ran deep with resentment.

His "prophecy" was not, at an historical level very profound;

but it was not a political and historical prophecy.

It was a prophecy rich in revealed truth and said more about God than about a building, more about the distant future than about what would happen in less than twenty years.

What was prophesy in the life time of Jesus was history by the time Matthew wrote this Gospel.

Matthew writes with hindsight about the Temple.

He knows that the resurrection, not the crucifixion, is the summit and climax of the life of Jesus. He writes to Hebrew/Christians about this Temple to stir their visions and their hope of what is to come, and propose an identity for this community of faith.

They lived day in and day out asking one question: "When will Jesus come again?"

Matthew, with the words and voice of Jesus gives them an answer.

He tells them that no one will know, and therefore

they should shape and live their lives in anticipation and expectation with hindsight, foresight, and insight.

With foresight we see in the present the future we are building.

We care and plan for our children, We look ahead to vacations and holidays.

We save. We work. We build. We love. We support.

These things turn our days and years into a life.

A look at these things gives us the skill or the power to prophesy about our future, because what we are doing these days is what we shall have left in the future when there are no more days.

If it's all about getting more stuff or paying for the stuff in the future, then we'll be doing that in the future;

just getting more and still paying.

If it's all about looking good and being liked, then we'll only "LOOK" good when time stands still, and that's what I always here people say when they look down at a body in a coffin:

"Doesn't he or Doesn't She look good?"

With hindsight we change the future.

We learn by experience.

We see where things went wrong.
We see wasted time and wasted people,
and hindsight can help us to see in the past what we do not want to see in our future.

With insight we value the present, the moment in which we live,
and recognize that what we have is pregnant with future potential.
We know that now is the time to feed the hungry,
that now is the time to forgive those we love and have hurt,
that now is the time to say: "I love you." "I'm proud of you." no longer go unsaid.

Matthew calls us to hindsight, to foresight, and insight.
He offers us the hindsight of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ,
and the response of the people of his time.
He offers us the foresight of the resurrection and a vision of the Kingdom
we shall unfold in the year to come.
He offers us the insight that we are a new temple, the living stones
of a new community of faith.

Jesus looks forward.
Matthew looks back.
We must look within.
Audio Available

146

2nd Sunday of Advent

12/5/2004

Isaiah 11:1-10 + Romans 15:4-9 + Matthew 3:1-12

Fr. Boyer

John, our guide in every Advent

speaks to us today as more than the "herald" of Jesus.

He does not rise up in our scriptures simply
to point to Jesus and then disappear from history.

He returns again and again each advent
as the one after whom the church should model itself.

And so in these first Sundays of this new year of grace and holiness,
we take a look again at this one whose prophetic voice and prophetic vision
is the model of what a prophetic church must become.

Just as his voice prepared for the first appearance of Jesus,
so must the voice of this church ready itself
and then all humankind for the second and ultimate coming of Jesus.

In more simple language,
the agenda of John the Baptist is the agenda of our church:
work for peace,
struggle for justice and an enduring harmony among all people.

Our world is hardly any different from the world of Isaiah
whose poetic and prophetic words we just heard.

This is still a world marked by social injustice
spiritual laxity,
and poor leadership.

His voice rose up at a time when the leaders and the people
faced an enemy relying upon military might and the support of allies
rather than fidelity to God.

The consequences of their choice are a matter of history.
They became divided among themselves and an easy prey to their foes.

The danger for them is the same danger we face.

That danger is spiritualizing the reality of the Kingdom of God.

At the root of the Incarnation -

At the bottom of what God does by becoming one of us -

is making real, historical, concrete, temporal, and earthly the Kingdom of God.

It is not for some other age or some place or condition called: "heaven."

In order for the peaceable Kingdom to become the possible kingdom,
it must be political as well as spiritual.

And I do not mean political in the sense of Democrats and Republicans.

I mean it must happen here, on earth.

We are the ones who will make peace,
and we will do it by faithfully living the will of God.

We are the creators of our own demise bringing on most of our own problems.

If we could just stop and asked ourselves

what we could do for our Creator rather than what our Creator can do for us, we might find ourselves following a much different path than the one we have previously chosen.

Our life together as church is not about what we can get here, or whether it is fun, entertaining, or "interesting" for that matter. Our life together as a church is about what and how we give and do for God. Yet this age all about pleasure, entertainment, and "ME." And so this church rises up, looking a little "out of it" like a man dressed in camel's hair eating locusts and wild honey. What we do is not about feeling good or being happy. It is about pleasing God.

Again and again, the prophets and Jesus tell us that Justice pleases God. And so, little works of charity that make us feel good are off the mark. They are short term repairs when there is need for long term solutions because we like instant things that feel good and look good. An example: Why are we ringing bells in front of stores every year? Because, we didn't fix the problem the year before. Now my example is not an excuse for silencing the bells, it is a prophetic challenge to do something that gets us to the day and the season when it will not be necessary to ring them. If we did nothing all year to address and challenge a system of injustice, then we'll be ringing those bells forever pretending that there will be no poor people in heaven. That heaven will never come. It was never promised us. Charity is something that happens out of our surplus. It is demanded of us. Justice, and the demands of justice come from an obligation to share God's creation more generously even if it means tapping our very sustenance when the needs of others so require.

So, here he is again. John, the model of the prophetic church. And here is Advent again, the time to remember and the opportunity to get it right. If what we hear from Isaiah is the Word of the Lord, and you said so at the end, then the Will of God is that the dream Isaiah possessed is ours to possess, and the wolf can become the guest of the lamb.

Before we walk into this holy place in another week, we should have made that day more possible and more certain, because the Kingdom of God is at hand.
Audio Available

147

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2004

Genesis 3:9-15,20 + Ephesians 1:3-6 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr. Boyer

The news in today's readings is not about the women: Eve or Mary.

It does not praise one nor blame the other.

The news is about God and God's involvement in human salvation.

If we stop with Mary on this feast, we miss the point.

Notice that the Gospel is not about her Conception, but about Jesus.

With that understanding, there are two important points of comparison between the reading from Luke and the reading from Genesis.

They speak of God's intimate relation with us.

The first issue we find common to both readings is fear.

Adam's answer to God who asks: "Where are you?" is, "I was afraid."

The trust and intimacy enjoyed by God with creation has been replaced by fear.

The words of the messenger spoken to Mary are, "Do not be afraid."

With that announcement, the era of "fear" that comes from guilt has come to an end.

The second issue has to do with life.

Adam names the women "Eve". It is a name linked to the Hebrew word for life, because "she is the mother of all the living."

Yet the consequence of their sin increases throughout the opening of Genesis with alienation, suffering, and death.

These humans brought to life by the breath of God hide from God.

The words of the messenger speak of birth and life.

With that announcement, the era of "death" that comes from sin has come to an end.

Today we celebrate God's gift of life, Christ's conquest of death, and the first person to share completely in Christ's gift, Mary Immaculate.

That great gift is our hope for fullness of life in Christ.

Now she is the mother of all the living.

The Good News is the best possible news.

Eve mourned in shame. Mary rejoiced.

Eve bore in her heart the tears of all. Mary brought Joy to the earth.

Eve gave birth to children of sin. Mary gave birth to the One who knew no sin.

The mother of our race brought death upon the world.

The Mother of the Lord brought life in abundance.

Eve gave us death. Mary gives us life.

Disobedience gave way to obedience. Unfaithfulness yields to faithfulness.

We may chose which mother we claim, and in doing so, we chose the family in which we shall live now and forever.

Audio Available

148

3rd Sunday of Advent

12/12/2004

Isaiah 35:1-6,10 + James 5:7-10 + Matthew 11:2-11

Fr. Boyer

The old and the new come together today.

The greatest prophet of the Old Testament
and the greatest prophet of the New.

The voice of the old way comes from a prison.

The voice of the new way is free.

This Gospel story could have ended here,
because the scholars tell us that its function was to introduce Jesus
and get John out of the picture.

But it doesn't end because John is not the only one in prison.

We are too.

Just like John we suspect, we hope, that the reign of God has begun.

Yet we find ourselves in prison.

Stuck and held back in our old ways:

Violent ways, selfish ways, prejudiced ways,
greedy, slow to forgive, impatient and intolerant,

we are like this doubting John

whose expectations of a Messiah are not quite fulfilled by this man from Nazareth.

He does not destroy our enemies.

There is still sickness, blindness, cancer, infidelity, injustice, and power abused.

Like John in prison, we are lonely, betrayed sometimes by the most loved;

and we are filled with doubts about whether it is really worth it to be honest,
to be truthful, to be faithful.

The doubts of John in prison are not hard to understand.

"Who's side are you on?" he must have wondered.

To his question comes the most simple response:

"What you see is what you get."

Then one of the deepest and most profound statements Jesus ever makes

comes from the pen of Matthew

revealing a great deal about the church that will receive this Gospel.

"Happy is the one who does not find in me a stumbling block."

It is a startling verse implying that faith

is not only a question of belief in the deeds of Christ,

it is also an act of faith. It is a choice to believe in spite of some evidence to the contrary that God is with
us, that God's reign has begun, that we are not alone,

left to ourselves, and without a vision of the future and the means to bring it into reality.

The person who really stumbles is not the one stricken by doubts, but the one not taken with Jesus.

Doubts do not destroy us. Indifference does and confusion about who Jesus is for us and what he can do
with us.

Advent when lived through the life and the eyes of John the Baptist

means getting ready for what seems impossible and improbable.
It is a season to be teased and tempted,
a season that raises our curiosity,
and invites us to see something that can change our lives.
Our managed and measured rationality never lets God be God,
never allows for the surprise of a baby born of a virgin,
nor the possibility of mercy, love, tolerance, patience and forgiveness
being better than revenge, punishment, and power.

The old and the new come together today.
The old way of anger and vengeance
meets the new way of mercy and love.
John must have wondered why Jesus
was eating with the very sinners he had cursed.
He must have wondered how it would be possible to save sinners
by chatting with them, smiling at them, and touching them.
Our joy today springs from the news that the old has been replaced;
that God has come to save us not condemn us;
that God has come to love us not despise us,
and that the Messiah for whom we long is far better than we could have imagined.

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are set free from our prisons
by a Savior who does not do what we want,
but invites us to do what he wants.
His coming begins a season of life that will permit us
to dance and sing and hope and serve and give and love;
and "Happy is the one who does not find in me a stumbling block."
Audio Available

149

4th Sunday of Advent

12/19/2004

Isaiah 7:10-14 + Romans 1:107 + Matthew 1:18-24

Fr. Boyer

It is Joseph's day, and he rises up from the pages of our scriptures
as a man of few words but bold deeds.
He rises up from the pages of our scriptures
because he faced his fears
and did not let them rule his life.
It is fear that haunted his life and his sleep,
but the reign of fear has ended
says the divine messenger again and again to anyone who will listen.
To Mary, to shepherds, to Joseph, to Zaccharia and Elizabeth, to you and to me
the message comes: "No Fear."
Wake up from fear-filled dreams
and let the dream of God the creator fill us with hope.

There is no place for fear.

It stalls the fulfillment of God's promises.

Under it lurks hatred, pride and ego. It wears the mask of war and battle.

Fear silences dialogue, conversation, and it hides behind shyness and timidity.

Fear drops bombs upon the innocent.

It mocks and ridicules those who are different.

It justifies jokes and cruelty about races, sexuality, physical size and shape, religions, and anyone who is culturally and socially different.

Fear is a roadblock to the Spirit of God, to Emmanuel.

Joseph does not let fear rule his life and affect his decisions.

With imagination inspired by his faith rooted in the Law and the Prophets,
he imagines something greater than his fears.

He looks at the worse possible options and sees the hand of God.

He looks at the most disappointing events and sees an opportunity.

He can have her stoned, put her away quietly, or take her home.

He knows that this child is not his own and other men may mock him

but he will not let that fear spoil an opportunity or influence his decision.

At the end of the Gospel today, Joseph makes his decision.

He takes Mary home and in so doing, he claims the child Jesus.

That decision, that adoption is a figure of what God is doing with us.

God has taken us into his home.

God has claimed us as his own.

When we could have been "stoned" or left for dead because of our sins,

when we could have simply been put away quietly, left to our own resources,

God chose another option - to take us and claim us as His own.

Joseph the carpenter becomes Joseph the prophet who reveals the ways of God.

Like all the prophets, Joseph was a dreamer who acted on his dreams.

The dreams of Joseph become the dreams of God.
Joseph had no fantasies of life without difficulties,
or of acquiring all sorts of good things for himself.
His dreams were touched by the graceful Spirit of God,
who made a place in his dreams for Mary,
so that he could then make a place for her in his home.
At Advent's end,
we could do no better
than to wish and hope that Joseph's dreams would be ours.
At Advent's end, with fear gone,
we can take Mary home with us and claim Jesus as our own
so that all of God's dreams for justice and peace may become our own.
Joseph made his life large enough to include the mother of his own liberator.
Only those who will set aside fear, act upon their dreams,
and make their lives large enough to embrace the unexpected,
and the unwelcome surprise
will find Jesus in their homes and be found in the company of Christ.
They are the ones who will discover that God is with them - Emmanuel.
Audio Available

150

Christmas Vigil

12/24/2004

Isaiah 9:1-6 + Titus 2:11-13 + Luke 2:1-14

Fr. Boyer

(The children have been given a wrapped gift box containing the statue of the infant for the crèche. It has been opened by several of the children and then in procession they have taken the "gift of Jesus" to the crèche. There in the chapel, they receive the following instruction.)

We have this wonderful feast of Christmas
because of one very important word.
Because Mary used that word and taught her Son to use it,
we are here tonight.
If we can learn to use that word,
many wonderful things can happen in this world.
Learning the word is easy.
Learning when to use the word is the hard part.
When you use that word at the right time, wonderful things happen.
When you use the opposite of that word, things can go wrong.

The Blessed Mother knew that word.
She learned it from her parents.
She learned it from the Bible and stories about our father, Abraham;
about Moses, and about King David, and the Prophets.
She used that word one day, and everything started to go right.
It is a word your mother and father have used,
and one time when they used that word right,
wonderful things started to happen.

That important word is: "Yes."

One day, a long time ago, a message came from God to Mary.
God asked her to do something she didn't understand.
It was something that meant she might have to change her plans
and do something she did not want to do right then.
She did not say: "No."
Her answer to God was, "Yes."
If she had said "No", we would not be here tonight so happy and so full of joy.
YES is the word we have to learn how to use.

On another day a long time ago
before they were married,
one of your parents asked the other one to do something
--- to marry them.
That day they used that word and something wonderful happened.
They started to make a home and get ready to welcome you:
all because of that good word: "Yes."

You know what happens sometime when you say: "No."
If Mom or Dad asks you to do something
like clean up your room or pick up your things or come and help
and you say "no" - things go wrong and no one is happy.

Now sometimes you have to say "no", and that is the hard part:
knowing when to say "no."
If one of your friends is doing something wrong
and they want you to join them,
you have to say "no."
That is the hard part --- knowing when to say "yes" and knowing when to say "no."

Saying "Yes" to your parents and your teachers
helps you to know what God wants you to do,
and it gets you ready to say "Yes" to God.
Tonight all of the world is celebrating and filled with joy and hope
because someone knew when to say "yes",
and because people like your mother and father have continued to say "yes"
for a long, long time.

Mary said it.
She taught Jesus to say it, and he did.
Now Jesus is teaching you to say it.
When you say "Yes" to God, wonderful things will happen.
There will be peace, and forgiveness, and love, and Joy.
and those wonderful things will not go away.

So, what is the word God wants us to learn and use wisely?
Audio Available

151

Christmas

12/25/2004

Isaiah 9:1-6 + Titus 2:11-13 + Luke 2:1-14

Fr. Boyer

We are part of the story being told through out the world today.

While we may tell the story in the past tense,
we live it in the present.

It is not just about shepherds and angels.

It is about you and me.

Those shepherds were not the only ones who hear good news in the night.

They are not the only ones who get up from what they are doing
and go seek the promised one, Christ the Savior, Immanuel.

We have heard a message - the Gospel.

We are up in the night, and have come here seeking what has been promised.

The coming of our God continues,

and God still uses the most simple and humble of ways to be with us.

That birth in Bethlehem was a way of getting us to look and see.

From all its humility and simplicity, we learn to look and see God's presence
not in riches and finery, not in power and palaces,
but in the poverty of two homeless refugees
and the helplessness of an infant.

Christmas is the very beginning of God's revelation to us, not the end.

Our assembly here continues the story being told
and the revelation unfolding.

The God who once came to Bethlehem in infant's flesh and blood
still comes to this place through bread and wine.

Those who can see God in an infant and see God on this altar
can discover God in all of life.

The presence of God in the gift of the Eucharist is not an isolated event
but the clue to how all of creation is to be seen.

So we have no need to go to Bethlehem to discover the Lord.

Christ waits here and where ever there is human need
and an opportunity for service.

There Christ lives as if in a manger.

Those who seek the spectacular will not notice.

The real presence of God

is only revealed to those who know what Bethlehem is really all about.

This Christ is not found only at Christmas.

He is within reach at all times and seasons
for those who can recognize God in the ordinary and the simple.

To keep us from losing this vision because it is so common,

Christmas happens once a year to remind us of how things are.

So we come here tonight asking God for a new way of seeing things,
and a new way of recognizing God in these times and in the things we do
that are so ordinary, common, and every-day.
Since the simple humility of God - in - Christ is seen most clearly
in the sacrifice of the cross,
we come asking for the ability to recognize the humble presence of the Lord
wherever we encounter suffering, pain, rejection, loneliness and despair.

While they are important as a way of showing our love, the best gift of Christmas is not found in brightly
colored packages around a tree.

There is a gift with no wrapper and no ribbon.

It is a gift given to us all: the ability to discover the divine in our lives
and the willingness to offer ourselves to any of God's daughters and sons
who need help, encouragement, and strength.

If these things seem too ordinary, too human, too simple,
we have missed the message and the truth of Bethlehem.

And so we have this day of reminder that comes once each year
that our God is Emmanuel, "God With Us".

He was not born in Rome or Jerusalem,
but in an obscure village of Judea,
and so His kingdom for us will not be found in Washington, in New York,
or any of the seats of power.

For us it will be found in Norman, Oklahoma one house at a time.

Emmanuel was not born in a palace with attending royal physicians.

He is born again and again in ever human heart
when forgiveness restores life to what has been broken or dead.

This is the beginning of the feast of Life itself.

It is the first day of the new creation.

It is the first hour when Light comes leaping into the darkness,
and we have been awakened to the dawn of our salvation.

The gifts we find as we awaken this Christmas are simple:
bread, wine, and the work of human hands.

If we can see God in a simple new-born baby,
then we shall God in the gifts we bring to this altar.

Come, let us adore.

Audio Available

152

Holy Family

12/26/2004

Sirach 3:2-6,12-14 + Colossians 3:12-17 + Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

Fr. Boyer

A quick and easy reading of the Gospel today in the context of this Feast might at first suggest that "family" is a matter of a mother, a father, and a son.

Yet everyone of us knows real families that do not fit that model.

In everyone of our families there is some exception to this image.

My own family tells me that.

My mother lived in an orphanage.

My father left his fatherless home before he was 18.

We live in an age when single-parent families, blended families, and

multi-generational families are just as common

as the "traditional" model we see in the Gospels.

Many of us know households that have parents who have never married yet are raising children together.

I have begun to suspect from the Gospels that what makes "family" is a matter of what happens, not who is there.

There are certainly homes in which a mother and father

live under the same roof as their children,

but it would be a stretch to describe the relationship they share as "family."

Parents who work around the clock,

who bring their lap tops and cell phones

to the soccer games and swim meets of their children have no connection with what I believe this Gospel suggests is a family.

After care programs, quick on-the-go meals, frenzied schedules

that leave no time for conversations between mothers and daughters,

fathers and sons, husbands and wives are not providing what this Gospel

suggests family life is all about.

The Gospels, especially Matthew and Luke suggest

that a family is a relationship that listens to and responds to the message of God.

For Joseph and Mary, that was a matter of dreams.

Dreams in that age were commonly thought to be messages from God.

For us, the message of God is found in the Gospel,

and so "family" can well mean a relationship formed around the Word of God.

Luke suggests that family is created by relationships

where growth in wisdom, knowledge, and favor before God take place.

Remember how he describes what went on in Nazareth

after Jesus was found in the temple.

This is the issue for us today on this feast.

Family is not simply a matter of who is there or who is not.

It is a matter of relationships that are responsive to the Will of God and relationships where wisdom, knowledge and grace are nurtured and grow. This is what made that family in Nazareth Holy, and it is what can make any family Holy.

The danger Joseph fled with his wife and the child was not just Herod. It was all that Herod stood for and Herod's refusal of the "dream", or the message and will of God. The danger we must flee is isolation, individualism, a consumer culture where time is a commodity scarce for the play and interaction that nurtures growth in wisdom, knowledge and favor before God.

Holy is the place where these things happen.
Holy is the people whose love, respect, honor, and commitment provide the climate for these things.
Holy is the family where dreams are remembered; and wisdom, knowledge, and grace abound.

It does not matter in the end, who is there.
What does matter is what happens.
Audio Available

153

Mary, Mother of God

1/1/2005

Numbers 6:22-27 + Galatians 4:4-7 + Luke 2:16-21

Fr. Boyer

In all the stories of this season, Mary says not a word.

Since her "fiat" - her response of "Let it Be" spoken to the angel, there has not been a word.

She says nothing to the shepherds or to the wise men who come calling.

It is possible that in real life, she had nothing to say because she did not understand these things herself.

What Luke tells us she did is probably more wise and more helpful than anything she could have said.

Luke simply tells us that she kept all these things and reflected upon them in her heart.

What good common sense this is!

What sound spiritual advice!

What a reasonable proposal it is for anyone who does not understand nor fully grasp what God is doing and what is happening in their lives.

Rather than deny or dismiss,

rather than make up something or trivialize with too much talking and too little thinking, Luke suggests that in the light of what God is doing it might be best to keep quiet and reflect upon this in one's heart.

What Luke seems to offer and propose to us is that the best response in the face of a surprise or a sudden and unforeseen change of circumstances

in our lives might be to hold this matter in one's heart, and ponder them with faith, with hope, and with courage based upon the promises of God.

It means living without all the answers,

being faithful when we don't know why,

and being hope filled when there is only reason to give up.

Mary the mother becomes Mary the teacher today - showing us the wisdom of silence in the face of the divine and the holy who has come to live among us.

No Audio Available

154

Epiphany of the Lord

1/2/2005

Isaiah 60: 1-6 + Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6 + Matthew 2:1-12

Fr. Boyer

In a moment we will hear a taped message from our Archbishop which he has asked us to hear on this weekend.

But before we do, I want to give you something to think about from the readings today, because this ancient feast of Epiphany is too significant to be lost until next year without some direct and personal attention.

One commentator on these verses from Matthew brought my attention to a detail I have never really heard before.

In reflecting on the fact that these Magi stopped for direction, she proposed that there must have been a woman among them, since men never stop to ask for directions!

It is a clever thought, and it gives us reason to suspect that their wisdom is greater than astronomy.

They were smart enough to stop and ask for directions.

That is real wisdom -- knowing when you do not know everything, and having the sense to stop what you're doing, and ask direction.

It is a sound principal of the spiritual life.

Occasionally asking for direction - paying attention to the fact that there are others who may know something we don't know, may have more information about the journey, or may know a better way to get there is real wisdom.

What is also profoundly important

is that these people, seeking the truth, seeking the light, seeking the Lord set out on a journey not know where it will lead them, nor what they will find when they get there.

In this, these magi are models of believers and seekers of truth.

Faith for us all is always a venture into the unknown.

None of us knows where faith will lead us nor what we will find when we get there.

How sad that Herod, the priests, and elders of the people do not follow these astrologers to Bethlehem.

What is it with them?

Too comfortable with the way things are?

Too afraid to give up a little power and some control?

So they do not follow the astrologers.

We can assume that the new revelation of God does not interest them.

They are not interested in the future, only in the past.

It cannot be that way with us, for we too have seen a new light.

And we must have no fear about following that light even though we do not know where it will lead us nor what exactly we shall find when we get there.

Audio Available

155

Baptism of the Lord

1/9/2005

Isaiah 42:1-7 + Acts 10:34-38 + Mt 3:13-17

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

156
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
1/16/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

157

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

1/23/2005

Isaiah 8:23-9:3 + 1 Corinthians 1:1-13,17 + Matthew 4:12-23

Fr. Boyer

With Matthew as a bridge, we stand between Christmas and Lent.

With Matthew as our guide from now until next November,
teaching is more important than miracles.

We shall hear more of what Jesus says than what he does.

The narrative of Christ's birth is closed now.

John the Baptist has been killed,

but his call to repentance has not been silenced.

No sooner than Matthew announces his death,

than he has Jesus take up the message himself.

Matthew puts Jesus in Zebulun and Naphtali: Capernaum,

because that's where the prophet said the Good News would first be heard.

It's a place like Sayre, Oklahoma.

We are not talking about prime real estate here,

but the message is clear: No place is too far for the Lord,
and no one is too little or of no value.

This is a culture of tight family identity.

Kinship matters and without it, one is lost.

Matthew moves Jesus out of his family, away from "their town"

and puts him in a new place where he begins today to form a new family.

And so to a group of fishermen he comes.

Fishermen: people who work hard.

There are not men who have power, influence, or prestige.

They are unschooled, tough, and they probably smell like dead fish.

They wait - have been waiting for a long time.

They wait for the fish: but more than that, they wait for the messiah.

They are synagogue and prophet-schooled to look, expect, and wait
for that messiah who will lead them from gloom and darkness
to rejoicing and an abundant harvest.

They wait for someone to lift the burden

and smash the rod of the taskmaster.

And so when he comes along

with what power or mysterious appeal we know not, they follow.

Where he takes them however is not where they expect to go.

As he puts out his map for the journey into the reign of God next week,

we too are invited into the mystery of what it means and where it will lead.

We are waiting too, just like the fishermen.

We work, we know darkness and gloom,

and we are no strangers to oppression terror and anguish.

There is a miracle here, but it takes some faith and some thought to see it.

The miracle is that, not matter how many times they had gone after another:

no matter how often they tried something or someone else,
those fishermen got it right that day.
They found the one who would take them,
the one who would fulfill their dreams and their hopes.

It is a miracle that can be repeated for us.

Most of us have tried everything there is,
everything we could imagine, think of, find, or create.
We try drugs, sex, fashion, and money.
We try power, oppression, violence, and lately, we try war
that we try to soften by calling it preemptive.
None of those things can ever or will ever bring us peace or joy.
They will not bring us security or fulfill our dreams.

We look to politicians for the things that can only come from the Messiah.
Governments and ideologies do not make peace.
Economic systems, materialism, and consumerism
do not make us secure, justice does.
It is Love not legal systems that brings peace.

The one who says: "Come, follow me."
offers us the way to find what we have dreamed of
since we awakened to sin.
We can chase after all kinds of phony plans and systems,
ideologies and "leaders", but only one can take us where we long to be.
This broken, violent, hungry, and homeless world remains so
not because the plan of Jesus has been found inadequate or wanting,
but because it has not been given a chance and put to use by people
willing to put down everything and every old way and follow Him.

Perhaps the miracle can happen again,
and we shall repent and turn from those old failed ways and go with Jesus.
The way may not be exactly as we imagined, and it may not be easy.
The presence of God's reign is so radical and powerful
that it calls men and women from the safety and security
of everyday routines to a life of unheard-of-newness.
For Peter, Andrew, James, and John, it required a break
with fishing and family to join Jesus in "fishing for others."
Following Jesus is not for the tentative and indecisive,
maybe that's why there are so few who take Him seriously.
How it shall be for us remains to be seen,
but it is clear that we getting no where as it is.
Audio Available

158

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1/30/2005

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13 + 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 + Matthew 5:1-12

Fr. Boyer

For people familiar with Bible images and language, this scene has layers of nuance and familiarity.

To a mountain Matthew takes us, and our first thoughts should be of Moses ascending Sinai.

There covenant tradition was established for a people who have been seeking, longing, and hoping for freedom for unity, and for a future with God.

Their past is marked by a long search that led them to many other and lesser gods.

Their life style has been marked by infidelity, violence, stealing and murder.

On that mountain with Moses as guide,

they are called away from all of that and offered a covenant

with the God of Abraham who asks of them a great deal,

but offers them even more.

What happens in Mathew's Gospel is a shadow of all that happened before. Israel did not get it right.

The old covenant brought them far, but not far enough.

It brought them power, but they abused it.

It brought them prosperity, but they abused that as well.

It brought them identity, but they would trade that

for less than God had promised.

But it also brought them Jesus.

Like another Moses, up the mountain he goes.

There he unfolds the conditions of the new covenant, one that will be sealed in his blood. Like the commandments which expressed the old covenant, the Word Jesus speaks unfolds the conditions and promises of the new covenant, and that is where we go today.

These Beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be. They are not glowing prophecies of some future bliss. They are exclamations of what is. And it is not for some future world postponed, either. It is a state into which the Christian should already have entered. The Beatitudes are a proclamation of what it means to know Jesus. They speak of joy that comes from walking in the presence of Jesus; a joy that nothing in this world can take away. They proclaim the conditions in which people of the Covenant live. So let us review them.

POVERTY does not mean that being poor is a good thing.

It does mean that helplessness is at least for those who put their trust in God. These are people who know that things mean nothing and God means everything.

MOURNING goes with poverty suggesting that while it is right to be detached from things, it is not right to be detached from people. When things go well, it is possible to live on the surface of things and never go deep---shallow lives.

Suffering drives us to the deep things in life, and when accepted rightly, a new strength begins. Nothing bonds people together like the sharing of suffering and pain.

GENTLE The gentle bless our lives with kindness, compassion, and patience. It simply means they are filled with respect: for themselves and for others.

RIGHTEOUSNESS Goodness is the issue here, complete goodness not partial goodness, not self-justifying

judgments about others, but a kind of balance and wholeness that brings one close to God.

MERCIFUL Get into the skin of another - inside their lives, that's what makes mercy. This is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. From that moment on, God knew what it was like to be human. Mercy springs from understanding what another experiences.

CLEAN OF HEART is the quality of simplicity -what you see is what you get, no agenda, no hidden motives, say what you mean, and mean what you say.

PEACE MAKERS are people who make this world a better place. They are not trouble makers, but rather, they are people in whose presence bitterness cannot live. They bridge the gulfs, heal the breaches and sweeten the bitterness. It is the work of God. To bring peace.

These are the conditions of the new covenant expressed in Christian tradition.

Moses gave commandments. Jesus gave beatitudes.

While some fight and argue over displays of the commandments in public, the beatitudes go begging for attention.

The path Jesus provides for those who would follow him leads to the New Covenant and the conditions in which we shall live it:

Dependent upon God and nothing else,

Dependant upon people and not stuff,

Gentle, Good, Merciful, Simple, and Peaceful.

This is the only way to live in covenant,

and the only way to follow Jesus.

Audio Available

159

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/6/2005

Isaiah 58:7-10 + 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 + Matthew 5:13-16

Fr. Boyer

These are verses immediately following last week's Gospel. Having described the qualities that mark disciples of Jesus with the Beatitudes, Matthew now has Jesus speak in direct address to affirm with two power images what is expected of us. This is the vision of community that Jesus has for those who call themselves his own: Salt and Light.

The presence of either one is unmistakable: when there is light, you see it, when there is salt you taste it. If either is missing, you know it very quickly. And so it is with disciples of Jesus. When they are present, you know it, when they are absent it is obvious.

The whole point here is simply that discipleship is for the sake of others. Salt is not eaten alone, but enhances other flavors or preserves other foods. Light is not self-contained but makes other things visible. Disciples are not called for their own sake, but for the sake of others. Disciples are once and for all expected to stand up and be counted. We are reminded today by all the readings that our spirituality as followers of Christ is very material. It concerns bread, home, body, flesh, and engagement in the painful realities of human suffering and need. The faith we share is exercised in real, concrete, material ways. To use an old image, there are "corporal works of mercy" just as important as "spiritual works of mercy". If you don't know what I'm talking about, or you have forgotten them, you need to look them up. The "works of mercy" are the foot prints of people following Jesus.

At a most superficial level, there seems to be a curious contradiction between what we hear today and what we hear on Wednesday. One says: "Let your light shine." The other says: "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." The contradiction is only superficial, and it comes from glossing over who is being addressed. The second saying becomes an excuse for all sorts of selfish behavior, and after thirty-seven years as a priest, I've heard it all. That odd excuse for not coming to church or for not pledging in a drive or sharing in the support of the church with envelopes. Quoting the instruction of Jesus: "Go to your room and pray quietly", or you should "not let your right hand know what the left is doing." The fact that those instructions are being given to hypocrites who put on an artificial show seems to pass them right by.

To disciples of Jesus comes this vision of what we must be to walk together in the foot steps of Jesus. We are to be seen like a lamp on the stand, and we are to spice up and preserve things of this world. Today we are being called by the Archbishop to stand up and be counted, bear witness, and gratefully be good Stewards.

Listen first to his written words of encouragement, and then hear and heed his request for the sake of the church in western Oklahoma.

Audio Available

160

Ash Wednesday

2/9/2005

Joel 2:12-18 + 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 + Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

Fr. Boyer

"We are ambassadors for Christ" says Paul.

We have heard that proclamation every Ash Wednesday of our lives.

because these readings never change. They are always the same.

What Paul asserts ought to give us a tremendous sense of purpose and pause.

We participate in God's work of salvation.

The Covenant we have makes a partnership in faithfulness.

Our failure to understand what Paul proposes is the focus of this season.

Living the vision of Christ is still not a way of life embraced by this world;

and so we still make a need for war,

the poor are still with us,

hatred and divisions are real,

unfair judgments are routine,

our own security is placed well over the needs of others,

lust for power still motivates the hearts of many.

In the midst of all that, we shall today wear a powerful sign of eternity;

the sign of a life different than the one we often choose to live.

It is the sign of the cross, the sign of a change of life and a return to the Gospel.

This is not a simply a season for self-denial,

it is a season for changing one's heart.

It is not about simply about penance for the sake of penance,

but about clearing through the clutter of our lives

and learning how to live the faith we profess.

The penance we accept this day: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting

are to be done in ways that change the heart

and deepen our commitment to God and to others

because we are ambassadors.

The state of the world in which we live calls us to these three practices

not for the sake of Lenten piety but because they are our only way to peace.

The crushing poverty of this world requires that we share our prosperity!

This is no longer a matter of "charity". It is a matter of Justice.

We must give or we shall sink into a pit of selfishness that will rob us of human dignity and ultimately our own identity and salvation.

Eating less is not a matter of losing weight or being physically fit.

It is the way to remember that some have not eaten at all,

and eventually, fasting may curb a consumerism that is consuming us.

Prayer is not a matter of asking for what we want when we're afraid.

It shapes us into a grateful people
who sing the praise of God at every hour of the day.
Gratitude becomes us,
and it reflects the grace that stirs in the soul of those Baptized into Christ.

We are ambassadors of reconciliation,
of peace,
of hope,
and love.

This Lent holds the promise of new life for us,
and it becomes the dawn of salvation.

"Return to me. Rend your hearts, not your garments." says our God.

"Turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel." says the Church.

"Lord, Have Mercy." says the repentant.

Audio Available

161

1st Sunday of Lent

2/13/2005

Genesis 2:7-9;3:1-7 + Romans 5:12-19 + Matthew 4:1-11

Fr. Boyer

Remember, Matthew has the Jewish people in mind when he writes.

We are always working our way through Jewish images and history.

It is important to keep this in mind

when looking for message and meaning in the Matthew Gospel.

For people steeped in the history or the Hebrew people,

a story about temptation in the desert is going to evoke powerful memories.

The temptations Matthew uses are the temptations to which the Israelites

fell victim: hunger in the wilderness, demand for a demonstration of divine power, and worship of a false god.

Where the Israelites failed, Jesus remains faithful.

With that point established, Matthew will refine the identity of Jesus

who will satisfy spiritual hunger, not just physical hunger.

He will refrain from using divine power simply to attract followers,

and he will be submissive to God's will, not his own.

In the weeks to come, we shall continue this unfolding of the Gospel from within the Old Testament as we are led through this season by Adam (today), Abraham, Moses, David, and Ezekiel.

It can be a most fruitful Lent if you choose to be led by these towering figures whose shadows we find in the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel.

So it is Adam today whose story reveals something of Jesus.

What Adam lost, paradise, "the holy ground" where life was lived in the presence of and in constant communion with God; Jesus shall reclaim.

What Adam did was become self-conscious rather than remain God-conscious.

The temptation Adam and Eve faced and failed was the temptation to put themselves at the center of their lives rather than God. Instead of talking to God, they talked to themselves, and it got them in trouble. They hid because they were self-conscious, conscious of their sinfulness rather than conscious of God's love.

They did not listen to the voice of God.

Instead of listening to the voice of life, they listened to the voice of death.

The one who will lead us back to the promised land, to the paradise where life not death prevails,

and where God is our constant companion is led by the Spirit to teach us about temptation and victory.

The temptation he meets in that desert is really the temptation of Adam and of every man and woman in every age:

The temptation to use one's gifts for one's self.

This one called the "beloved", the chosen one, God's own son as he was called just verses earlier at his baptism has many gifts and a privileged place in creation.

Ultimately what he is tempted to do by this devil is use those gifts for himself.

Will he use his power to satisfy his own needs, or will he rely on God's Word?
Will he dare to prove himself. that God cares for him with special love,
or is he willing simply to rely quietly on his relationship with God?
Will he compromise a bit to enjoy the power and the rush
of controlling his own destiny, or will he bend his will to God's?

This is not just a story about Jesus.

This is also a story about us,
about the Israelites before us,
and about all human kind.

It is also a story about God
and God's relentless desire to have us back on that holy ground,
in that holy place where again God will walk with us and all will be well.

Jesus tells the story of his own struggle today to strengthen us in our own.
The story comes around again because of the willingness of Jesus
to be led by the spirit in the desert of our lives;
and once again we have the choice to choose between life and death;
a self-conscious life or a God-conscious life;
the will of God or our own self-willed, self-motivated, self-centered existence.
The choice is ultimately to be with God or to be alone,
to be in communion or to be isolated emptiness.

This season is not about "making up for sin."

That is not our task.

That has been done by God in and through Jesus.

Our task is to avoid sin in the first place,
to live in the grace of the life of the Spirit of Jesus.

This season is our time to sharpen our wits and strengthen our wills
to live every day in the Spirit of Him who died and rose to life with God.

So the "mantra" heard in this church

more than a thousand times on Wednesday still bears repeating:

"Turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel."

Audio Available

162

2nd Sunday of Lent

2/20/2005

Genesis 12:1-4 + 2 Timothy 1:8-10 + Matthew 17:1-9

Fr. Boyer

Lent's second week: first it was Adam, now it is Abraham.

Moses, David, and Ezekiel are yet to come in this pilgrimage through Lenten Sundays. The holy ground of "paradise" where intimacy with God and harmony with all creation was lost by the willful choice of Adam and Eve is not lost forever.

Now another couple step before us in this season who make a different choice, and through their story we get a vision of Jesus Christ and his disciples on holy ground.

Abraham's response to God is critically important to notice.

Unlike the man and woman in the garden of Eden who disobey God, who listen to a serpent and not God,

who choose to listen to something created rather than the creator,

Abraham is obedient and begins his journey to the new land.

The story of Sara and Abraham is the story of Israel and the new Israel of Jesus Christ.

Without hearing any biblical details as to how the voice Abraham heard came or sounded, we know that the speech of God to which Abram listened placed at the center of his life, a promise, a purpose and a presence other than his own.

God's speech, God's words call into existence for Abram that which did not exist until God spoke. Abram is indeed reborn, fresh from the word, as an old hymn puts it, and with a new name, he leaves behind all that is familiar and common for an unknown future. It is the foundational journey of every human life.

Promise is at the heart of this narrative. Listen again to the text.

I will show...I will make....I will bless....I will make....I will bless. It's all Promise!

New Life is the Purpose of this narrative.

It is offered to our Father Abraham, and he accepts.!

With that acceptance comes a new name and a prosperous future never imagined.

Life now has purpose - the journey, the return to the land of promise and presence.

The promise and the purpose is PRESENCE - life in the presence of God.

That is Holiness and Wholeness.

What was broken will be healed.

What was spoiled will be cleaned.

What was divided will be united.

Through that rich memory of revelation and covenant

Matthew tells the story of Presence

as Peter, James, and John get a glimpse of the heavenly paradise, the holy ground where the deepest hope and highest aspiration is fulfilled.

Moses and Elijah are present, representing the Law and the Prophets, the means by which the will of God had formerly been made known to humankind.

Suddenly, they are absent from the vision, and the voice explains it all.

From that moment on, Jesus, who fulfills the Law and the Prophets will be the one who sets forth the new law and speak as prophet for God. "Listen to Him."

"Listen" is exactly what Abraham did.

He set out without a map, without a clue as to where he would go, and simply did what was asked of him in faith.

No wonder he is called the "father" of faith!

We are two weeks into our Lenten pilgrimage.

As children of Abraham, we learn to listen.

It is an essential discipline of this season.

It means we must quiet the external noises of this world.

Silence the commercials, silence the serpent like voices of this world, and listen for God, for His Word, and for His call.

We are invited as disciples of Jesus to ascend the mountain, to stand on the Holy Ground again, and return to paradise, where our deepest hopes and highest aspirations, UNION WITH GOD is our constant Joy.

In the deepest recesses of our hearts and souls, our longing for God keeps us restless.

It may take some time to work itself into our conscious decisions, but it will as we learn like Jesus to listen and obey.

When we understand what is revealed on the mountain:

we will be filled with hope for is to come: Promise,

have courage to listen and obey: Purpose,

and then one day find ourselves again in that holy land called "Paradise"

where we shall live again in the company of our God: Presence.

Audio Available

163

3rd Sunday of Lent

2/27/2005

Exodus 17:3-7 + Romans 5:1-2,5-8 + John 4:5-42

Fr. Boyer

Adam then Abraham have stood before us this season unfolding the plan of God to restore us to the holy ground of paradise. The land we have been promised.

Having led the people of Israel from Egypt where they might have been tempted to think that all was well, that the plenty of those "flesh pots" as he calls them was really "heaven."

He has taken them to the desert where there is nothing;
to the desert where there are no man-made comforts or pleasures;
to the desert where finally there is nothing to rely upon but God.

Of course stripped of all their comforts and plenty, they complain.

They doubt that God is there just as we do when it happens to us.

They become bitter and quarrelsome

when immediate satisfaction of their needs does not happen.

Their hopes for a good life are threatened by a desert experience because it is not what they expected or bargained for when they trusted Moses and his God.

What they learn, and the lesson they teach us

is that the power to quench thirst does not reside in Moses; it resides in God.

Jesus of Nazareth, prophet and teacher

has learned that lesson from his youth in the synagogue and in his home.

In his own "exodus" story, his own journey back to his father,

he teaches again the lesson of Moses to a people who are quarrelsome and complaining, doubtful and bitter: the apostles and the Samaritans.

The "holy ground" or "paradise" for which we long has no work or labor, want or need.

Our hope for heaven suggests that the condemnation we read of in Genesis will be reversed. (3:17-19) "Painfully will you get your food from the earth as long as you live...By the sweat of your face you will earn your food until you return to the ground as you were taken from it."

The Samaritan woman is tired of her labor. She is all of us who work and labor

day in and day out. She hauls that water back home only to turn around and to it again and again, dreaming of a time when it will no longer be needed.

And suddenly she looks up to discover that it might be possible, and her hope rests on the most unlikely of possibilities, a Jew.

It is like the Israelites standing around a rock.

No one would think that water would come from a rock.

It comes from a wells dug deep in the earth.

No Samaritan would think that anything good could come from a Jew.

The messiah for which they longed would be one of their own.

But it is not so.

Moses is not directed to do the usual thing, dig a hole.

He is not led to some secret spring. He is told to bang on a rock!

The Samaritan woman never able to quench her thirst
is led back to the ancient well where she meets a Jew,
the most unlikely and unexpected of persons!
In his presence, she finds paradise and her thirst is at an end.
Her labor and the sweat of her face is finished.
Now her work is to bring others to this holy ground.
Moses followed God into the desert because he had faith that God
would carry Israel into a new way of living.
He knew the risks, and he did it anyway.

It seems so odd that Jesus had better luck with outcasts and Samaritans,
lepers and gentiles, children and slaves than with his own.
The orthodox had a hard time hearing what Jesus had to say.
Too concerned over what they had to lose, they have hardened hearts.
The Samaritan woman had nothing to lose.
She understood the message, and she went running to tell others.
In fact, she left her water jar behind!
Water jars were expensive - it was all she had to hang on to for water.
But she left it behind. Then the apostles come a long and grumble.
Like us, or we like them, are not quick to leave what we have come to trust.
We don't want any risk involving God.
We want the safe way into heaven even though we've been told by Jesus
time and time again that there is no such thing.
We like things the way they are with us in control, knowing what feels right,
what is familiar and comfortable, and we want it to stay that way.
The apostles did not like this Samaritan stuff.
They liked the safety and guarantee that they would get to heaven their way
with prescribed prayers and doing what they've been told.
Twenty centuries later, we are still telling the story,
thirsty, and longing for paradise.
We are still giving our money, our gold, to make false gods,
and the truth is, where we spend it or who gets reveals our values.
The God who gets the left-over is not really our god.
It is the same with our time: in a bed, before the TV, or before the Altar?
Where we spend the best of it reveals what matters most.
Still those who have the most to lose are least likely to wander into a desert
and find the God who will lead them to holy ground.
Our Lent is about such a journey and such a desert.
Forty years or forty days --- the risk of leaving things and ways that are comfortable for the discomforts
of the desert is our choice - one will leave us thirsty no matter how often we go to its well, the other
leads us home to paradise for which we were made.
Audio Available

164

4th Sunday of Lent

3/6/2005

Exodus 17:3-7 + Romans 5:1-2,508 + John 4:5-42

Fr. Boyer

The promised land, the holy ground is at hand,
but Jesse and Samuel in the Old Testament cannot see it.

They do not at first "see as God sees."

When they do everything is different.

The youngest, the least one, the one no one would have thought of,
David, is chosen, anointed, and then leads Israel to become a great nation
enjoying God's presence, God's gifts, and God's protection.

He unites the tribes, suppresses the enemy, initiates a reign of justice,
builds a new city of peace and brings the covenant to its temple.

His anointing ages later in history gives identity to the one who is to come:
"The Anointed of God", who also comes from Bethlehem.

The holy ground can still be seen, but it takes a blind man to lead us.

because that blind man sees as God sees.

He does not look at appearances.

He does not see what looks good, what is in style,

what will make him look cool, or appear to have good expensive taste.

In the meantime, those who think they can see, who judge by appearances,
who need to look good in order to feel good know nothing of being good
or of being in the presence of goodness.

At Lent's center - midway through these forty days,

we came face to face with images of baptism

because that is what lies ahead for us.

A discussion on sin misses the point.

It is a tactic of diversion - talking about HIS sin keeps them from their own.

Those people who confront the man who can see
will not look at their own sin.

They are too concerned and too busy about his sin or the sins of his parents.

So, they fail to discover the divine presence in their midst
and the holy ground upon which they stand.

No miracles for them.

Our Lenten Journey with David leading will make us a great nation-a holy people.

Even though we may not look like it sometimes,

and even though some may think us unworthy,

or we may feel inadequate to the task and anything but holy,

that is what we are called to be by the God who made us his own

and will not rest until we are home again in His presence in His paradise in obedient to His Love and His Will.

David was anointed, the Blind Man was anointed and washed in the pool by the command of Jesus.

We too are anointed people who have washed in the pool of Baptism.
We are soon to lead others along the same path
and rejoice with them in the presence of our God in this Holy Place
where we hear his word and speak to him in gratitude and love.
The dust of our beginnings becomes the mud of our anointing -
and the darkness of sin gives way to the dawn of salvation.

These are the mysteries we are about to celebrate in two weeks
during the week we call holy because of God's action and our response.
The nights of Triduum are not nights to stay home.
As long as there is one empty seat in this church on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, or at the Vigil, this
church is empty, and ingratitude and indifference have had their way among us.
To take Holy Communion week after week;
to bring our children with excitement and joy to their First Communion
and stay home on the night of Communion's Institution is a shame.
To make the sign of the cross day after day and stay home on the night when that cross is venerated and
its story proclaimed is a curious display of inconsistent values.
To be too busy or claim it's too long to keep Vigil on Saturday is to side with sleeping apostles who can't
keep company with Jesus as he suffers, dies, and rises for us all.

Next week it is Ezekiel whose prophesy describes us,
whose vision sees us made new
because of how we have lived in faith these forty days.
It is a new spirit that we seek, a new that we are given, a new life that is promised.
Our hope this season is that with the light of Christ and his Spirit,
we shall see as God sees,
and be seen by God as David seen, called, anointed, and blessed.

Audio Available

165

5th Sunday of Lent

3/13/2005

Exodus 17:3-7 + Romans 5:1-2,5-8 + John 4:5-42

Fr. Boyer

We all have places we would rather not go back to.

Times and places in our past, in our childhood;
relationships that have gone sour and broken;
topics of conversation we would rather avoid,
and things we have left unresolved.

The disciples remember that rock-throwing crowd with blood in their eyes.

They don't want to go back there, but Jesus does, and he's going.

In the mind of the disciples, what's the use?

Lazarus is already dead. It's too late for that.

Those disciples are thinking: "You want to risk our lives to look at a dead man?"

It is a good idea to tell the story of Lazarus coming from the grave
two weeks before we tell the story of Jesus coming from the grave,
because they are not the same, and the difference is important.

One is resuscitation.

The other is resurrection.

We know which one we need.

The resuscitated Lazarus will die again. That's not for us.

The resurrected will rise to new life never to die again.

That is a much better option, and the option we have in Jesus Christ.

"Let's go to Judea again", Jesus says.

Not because he wants us to die for a good cause or because he wants to suffer,
but because he wants us to be part of what God is doing in the world.

He wants us to be there when he comes to Bethany, and says,

"Take away the stone."

It is no insignificant detail that Lazarus comes out tied hand and foot.

The voice of the Lord is that powerful!

Those bindings could never hold him back.

But I have wondered about the scene of this gospel for a long time.

I have wondered about Lazarus and what it was like for him.

It is easy to imagine Martha and Mary with their prayers answered,
their brother restored to them, their friend finally coming to their rescue.

At last they get to benefit from one of the great powerful signs
they have seen and heard of time and again.

But what about Lazarus?

What if he didn't want to come out?

What if he liked it in there, preferring the tomb to the reality of his life?

It hardly seems fair. Now he will have to die a second time.

The first time was bad enough.

He'd lingered and suffered for several days. Who would want to do that twice?

I have even thought that when he heard that voice cry: "Come Out."

He said, "No, I don't want to." "I like it in here."

I wonder if he thought: "I don't want to go back to those bickering women who are always courting your favor while arguing about who helps in the kitchen?"

For many of us, a quiet place away from demands, work, schedules, expectations, the needs of others who might depend upon us is a very tempting option.

In some ways, Lazarus and the disciples were both in hiding:

one in the tomb, the others outside of Judea - hiding from the rock throwing crowd and the consequences of choosing life with Jesus.

They wanted it safe and easy, but it was not be so.

Jesus confronts them both with their inclination to withdraw from people, from pain and effort, and from anything that might shatter their comfortable existence. There is something in us all that makes us want to hide, to withdraw into our busy calendars and schedules, but that is not life, and Jesus came to call us to COME OUT of that and have life.

The tomb cannot be our final resting place.

The command of Jesus is loud and clear today.

To those of us who might be hiding

or tempted to slip into a tomb somewhere he says: "COME OUT."

To those who have made the journey to Bethany with him, there is even more of a message.

We are either Lazarus called to come out and get on with living,

or we are commanded to untie those who have no life

because they are bound by poverty, by ignorance, by race, culture, or anything that keeps them from really living.

We are commanded to set them free -- to loosen their bindings,

to untie them, so that together we may, go with Jesus to participate in the work God is doing in this world.

So the fifth and last figure of the Old Testament rises up today with his image of dried bones -- an image that too often describes the way we feel or the way we look. He offers the promise of a time when it will not be so, when this world will not be a desolate place of suffering, death, violence and fear, and in Lent's last week, this is our promise as Jesus invites us to get up and go with him to a place that might look like death; but really holds the promise of Life for those who want to join him in doing the work of God. To do so, we must come out of our little tombs and be about the work of unbinding and setting those free who do not have Life.

Audio Available

166

Palm Sunday

3/20/2005

Isaiah 50: 4-7 + Philippians 2:6-11 + Matthew 26:14-27:66

Fr. Boyer

Matthew leads us to raise an important question.

Is Jesus an innocent victim of sinful, violent, and jealous human beings?

Or, does he experience this violent death because God willed it?

It's a question often avoided, but it still lurks in shadows,

and it leaves many profoundly confused

about God, about suffering, and about the death of Christ itself.

There is little doubt that Judas,

who was probably a member of a right-wing, zealot faction

betrayed Christ because he felt betrayed.

He wanted nothing to do with this peaceable, loving, man

whose inclusive and patient ways disappointed him.

Judas probably felt betrayed by Jesus, not the other way around.

He wanted a Messiah who was going to come in, clean things up, and

put things in order, and get rid of the Romans.

When he got the picture of what Jesus really wanted to do,

he not only wanted nothing to do with it, he wanted to silence the plan.

The Chief priests considered themselves the sole interpreters of God's Will.

They were the interpreters of tradition, not this upstart from Galilee.

He had no right to bring a message that challenged them,

threatened the nation's relationship with Rome and their security.

He had to be stopped, and for them, the end justified the means.

The Will of God however was not violent,

nor does the outcome of this conflict

indicate that God's willed the death of Jesus.

It is a distortion of everything Jesus revealed about his Father

to think that God would find any of that pleasing.

For Jesus, it was God's will that conscience prevail,

that truth not be silenced by power, and that peacefulness, love, and forgiveness prevail over everything and anything that threatened the unity of the human family.

The poor were to have a place at the table now, not when their dead.

The cry of the helpless and powerless was to be heard

over and above the roar of the mighty.

Women, children, sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, the unfaithful,

the broken, jobless, and abandoned were gathered up,

and they received the gift of his power - a power he never used for himself.

This was the will of God. It was the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

There is not one hint in all of revelation to suggest that the will of God has changed; that God has

anything to do with or is anywhere near violence,
hatred, oppression, or the selfish ambition of power abused.

When we proclaim the Passion of Christ, whether it is from Matthew or from John, the point is not the violence nor the injustice.

To get all hung up on nails and thorns, and whips is to fail to grasp the message and see what the death of Jesus was really about.

The point of it all is that one of us has put the will of God above everything else, and broken the cycle of violence and hatred, fear, ambition, and selfishness.

It is possible that the peace, the forgiveness, and the all inclusive love of God can prevail, and when it does for everyone of us, there will be resurrection and real life forever and ever.

Audio Available

167

Holy Thursday

3/24/2005

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14 + 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 + John 13:1-15

Fr. Boyer

I was reading recently about Martin Luther King. It seems that there were times in his life when discouragement was overwhelming, when the attacks of people upon his intentions, reputation, and efforts at human rights were ridiculed; when he was threatened and cursed, humiliated and reviled. When the experience of helplessness and hopelessness would haunt his days and nights, he would often repeat to himself over and over again the words: "I am Baptized. I am Baptized. I am Baptized." The reminder would renew him, restore his dignity, his vision, hope, and courage.

Such a reminder is good for us as well, especially now as we assemble here the next three nights to celebrate and be renewed by the Paschal Feast. When the Israelites would find the going tough in the desert, Moses would remind them of what had happened and what God had done for them. To make certain that they would never forget, every year they ate the food, told the story, and shared the blessing prayers that delivered them and bound them to God and God to them. We continue to do the same thing. We get discouraged and we fail to live as disciples of Jesus. We grumble. We doubt, and we get afraid. We find ourselves helpless and sometimes hopeless in the face of evil. Sometimes we even do forget long enough to lose ourselves, our dignity, and our identity with the result that no one would have any reason to suspect that we too are "followers of that man."

But tonight, tomorrow, and the next, we shall go into a tomb of sorts in order to come out in glory with the dawn of Easter.

We are Baptized! The eternal reality of this fact does not allow us to give up, give in, or forget.

We are Baptized, and so we get on our knees and wash feet because we are no greater than our master, and He taught us well.

We are Baptized, and so we give and give and give to care for the poor who have no one to look to except us just as they looked to our master.

We are Baptized, and so we want nothing more than to fulfill the Father's will and see that everyone knows the healing and all embracing love that prompted the Son of God to leave the Father and bring us home.

We are Baptized, and so the covenant symbols of Christ's Body and Blood are precious to us, sacred and powerful to bind us together and hold us in unity. Before them, we fall on our knees just as we kneel before each other, but in those symbols the divine and the human are in Covenant are in Communion: Holy Communion, and the Incarnation is fulfilled.

What we have to remember is too much for one night.

The story is too long, the meaning is too great to ponder in just this hour.

And so we shall do it tomorrow and the next day because we are Baptized, because what we celebrate is not simply something that happened in the past a long time ago, but something that continues to happen as we die and rise with Christ and live in His presence, His peace, and His love.

Nothing should keep us quiet tonight.

Nothing should keep us away tomorrow and the next.

Nothing should keep us from the holiness to which we are called, because we are Baptized, washed in blood, washed in water, and washed in the Spirit of new and everlasting life.

When you get lazy, when you get tired, when you get discouraged, when you get alone, and when you get helpless;

it is time to remember: we are Baptized.

We have a claim on God, we have a share in His power, in His glory, and in His Life, now and forever.

If you believe that, it is going to make a difference, a big one, a lasting one.

Audio Available

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Good Friday

3/25/2005

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 + Hebrews 4:14-16;5:7-9 + John 18:1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

"And God said: "It is good."

There was a formless void.

There was darkness, and there was water.

With these images, the writer of Genesis gives us God's first word.

"And God said: "It is good."

Encouraged by those images, and formed in that word,

we look at the scene John has put before us.

It was chaotic and formless.

The darkness is there always in contest with the light.

The water is there - from six stone water jars in Cana to a well in Samaria.

From Pilot's wash basin to a lance-opened wound in the side of Christ.

And God looked at it all and spoke again: "It is good."

But what is good about an dead innocent man

betrayed by friends,

abandoned by those closest to him,

rejected by those who should have known better?

What is good about an execution Roman style?

What is good about ambition, jealousy, and torture?

What is good about choosing a murderer over a healer?

Nothing at all.

These are not the things that make this day Good.

In themselves, they are enough to make it "Guilty Friday" or "Gruesome Friday."

Left to ourselves, it would better be called: "Bad Friday" or "Shame Friday."

But this day is not about us and what we can do to one another, to the innocent, and to good people.

This day is about God.

It is God who makes this day Good, and the best we can do is acknowledge it and be glad.

This day is more than holy.

It is Good because God looks at the mess we have made, and God speaks again.

The same Spirit that moved over the waters of chaos at the beginning

moves over the chaos of our sinfulness.

The same Spirit that moved over the formless void

moves over the void of our failures

over the darkness of our shame, and once again it creation time!

Once again God looks and says that it is good!

It is not good that we kill,

not good that the innocent suffer

not good that we betray the prophets among us

not good that power is abused
but it is good because out of all this God can create again what He promised at the beginning.

And so because we know what God can do with a bit chaos and darkness,
we look at the Passion of Christ
and see more than destruction and death.

We see what power there is in Love - God's love for His only Son.

We are the object of that Love: a love that is steadfast, everlasting, unimaginable, and all embracing.

No matter what chaos we make of God's creation or no matter how much death we bring and suffering
we cause,

God's Love looks upon us all, and the divine voice speaks again that word of blessing: "It is good."

It is good to be here.

It is good to be children of God.

It is good to hear the Gospel.

It is good to be redeemed and raised up.

It is good to be forgiven and forgiving.

It is good to be holy, washed, anointed, and enlightened.

It is good to remember, to give thanks, to be sorry, to be touched by God and to touch the cross.

It is a good day.

It is a Good Friday.

Audio Available

Fr. Boyer

With all the symbols of this night we have expressed what we believe and what we have hoped for since the day we were first told the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh.

Tonight I want to speak to those who have come here for the first time, to those who have for weeks and months been faithful to their formation and preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.

The ancient rites being celebrated in every Catholic Church on earth tonight are all about one thing. They tell one story. They happen because God wants us to understand one thing.

To make it unmistakably clear, I want to share with you a story I read this week about his father t left me humbled, silent, and grateful. The story was told about his father by a young man named Matt.

"The fire radio woke my father from a well-deserved sleep and notified him of a car accident that had just occurred a quarter-mile from our home. He was accustomed to being awakened by emergencies. This sort of night was familiar to him as a veteran firefighter. Dad was the first to arrive, several minutes before the ambulance. He found an overturned car and a driver who was confused but conscious. Quickly moving to the passenger's side of the vehicle, he assessed the condition of the unconscious victim still trapped inside. From his years of experience he knew immediately that the injuries would be fatal. There was nothing in his experience however, that prepared him for a more horrifying discovery: the victim was his son.

"After what seemed like a lifetime for my father, the ambulance crew arrived, freed my brother from the car and transported him to the nearby hospital. A death watch followed. When it was clear that Joe was brain dead, my father ordered the removal of advanced life support and Joe died in a few hours later. He was 16 years old. The driver of the vehicle, my brother's 17 year-old friend Kenny, was treated for minor injuries and released. Soon afterward, he was cited for six criminal infractions in connection with the accident, including vehicular homicide because he was driving under the influence of alcohol.

"The following November, Kenny pleaded guilty to the charges and was awaiting sentencing. Under the Victim/Witness Act just passed in our state, my father was invited to submit a statement about the impact of the event on him and his family that the judge would take into consideration. May dad said that he would do so and asked to deliver it in person.

"On the day of sentencing, Dad rose and faced the judge and in a quivering voice told the court that the night of the accident had been the most horrible time of his life and he continued:

My son Joseph was a bright, good-natured young man with enormous potential. The emotional impact of this event on my family has been devastating. Today the driver of the vehicle stands before you awaiting sentencing. He has admitted to his guilt. He was Joseph's friend; yet through the thoughtlessness of his actions, Joseph is dead. He did not approach that terrible night with the thought of harming anyone, least of all his friend, but the result is that one young man is dead, our family has suffered, his family has suffered, and not least of all, he himself has suffered. Now he must bear the knowledge of what he did for the rest of his life. That burden is far greater than any punishment this court could dispense. For this reason, I respectfully request that this court hear the appeal of the victim's parent and family and impose the minimum possible sentence.

"The judge granted the request. The young man received a six-month suspended jail sentence and two

years of probation and was ordered to perform 1,000 hours of community service.”

The father in this story was able to see the future, not the past. In the living friend of his son, that father was able to see more than the kid who killed his son.

If that was all he could see, there would have been no hope. Joe’s death was Kenny’s doing, but it was not Kenny’s being. The father in this story was able to tell the difference; and in this story, we begin to see how it is with God, and what this night is all about: faith and hope.

Faith gives us the eyes with which to see the world as God sees it. Even though faintly we see our brothers and sisters in this life as God sees them. We can begin to understand that the totality someone’s doings however awful they may be, is never the total of someone’s being. Every man and every woman everywhere is always loved as much by God as any other man or woman everywhere. That love is the wonder of this night and it is worthy of our greatest efforts to understand.

The world is desperate for the radical forgiveness of which Jesus spoke. It is the kind of forgiveness the young driver in this story received. Healing is always found in an act of forgiveness, and tonight we are healed once again as we recall another father who, through the death of his son, forgave the seemingly unforgivable, allowing a shaft of light to pierce the darkness of a weary, angry world.

Audio Available

Fr. Boyer

Nowhere in the Gospel does anyone ask the question: "How."

The women who are the first to announce that Christ is not dead make no effort to explain how it happened or what happened.

No one knows what happened in that tomb.

The evidence given by the witnesses is simple:

the body is no longer where they put it;

the sealed tomb is open and empty.

People by experience know and recognize the presence of the one who had been dead.

No matter how much some wanted to control that information, they could not do so.

No matter how powerful the Roman army was, they could not prevent the opening of that tomb.

The most powerful force on earth, the Roman army, collapsed like the dead in fear.

At the same time, unarmed women, though afraid, are comforted and rejoice.

They had seen it all: the trial, the crucifixion, the burial, and the sealed tomb.

Their charge was not to explain how Christ was raised, and they didn't even try.

They were charged to tell what they had seen and heard;

that the one once dead had risen.

The one they wrapped in burial clothes and placed in a tomb was alive.

The one they left for dead has gone before them into the world.

And because of their witness, we are here today,

either out of habit, out of faith and joy, or because once again we need to be here.

Faith in the resurrection

is more than belief that a tomb filled for three days is now empty.

It is more than belief in a dead body brought back to life.

Faith in the resurrection is the sure knowledge that God acts,

that God is faithful,

and that God has not and does not abandon the weak, the captive, the sorrowful.

Resurrection faith believes that because Christ lives, we live!

It sends us into a world that has lost hope, misplaced hope, and defeated hope.

In that world, we bear witness

that the presence of sin and violence is not the last word,

because God is acting today to create a world of justice and righteousness.

This day is not a matter how Christ rose, nor is it a matter of rational argument.

There is nothing rational about the resurrection.

No one argued the point to those first believers.

They came to faith because of witness, not arguments or proof.

The only argument for the resurrection

is what we do because of it and what we become from it.

We do not have to look into an empty tomb in which we had placed a body and sealed the entrance.

We simply have to be in the presence of someone who lives in love, God's Love, and we know Christ is alive.

We simply have to restore peace where it is lost, give forgiveness where it is needed,

and live the irrational, unselfish, extravagantly generous and merciful live of Christ and others will know that Christ is alive.

The truth of the resurrection is not found in an empty tomb.

It is found in the lives of people transformed by faith.

The greatest power known at the time: the Roman Army could do nothing.

The greatest schemers and political manipulators could not make their lie stick that someone had stolen the body.

All because the weakest of all - a couple of frightened women were transformed by love and grace.

The promise has been fulfilled.

They went and told the truth of the resurrection.

They showed those who were afraid and hopeless that they need not fear nor lose hope.

They showed those who trusted in their own power that their power is not and will never be enough.

They showed the Risen Christ, and so must we by the way we cling to hope, trust in mercy, grant forgiveness, and live in peace, in love, and always in Joy.

Audio Available

171
2nd Sunday of Easter
4/3/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

172
Prayer Vigil
4/8/2005

Fr. Boeckman

Audio Available

173

Third Sunday of Easter Season

4/10/2005

Acts 2:14-22-33; First Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

Fr. Boyer

When you tease out all the theological, sacramental, and paschal issues from this Gospel, it settles down to one simple issue, something even a child can grasp: Recognition.

The 31st verse puts it right out there: "Their eyes were opened....."

That by way of observation is the passive voice in grammar.

In other words, it was not something they did.

Something happened to them.

Then in terms of grammar, the verb changes from passive to active.

"They recognized Him."

Now that is a matter of something they did,

and this is the issue put before us today.

From our reading of the scriptures we learn

that some did not recognize immediately.

It took the apostles from the Easter till Pentecost to get it right.

They had several opportunities, and yet they did not always get it right.

Even after Pentecost, not everyone recognizes.

Both the first reading and the Gospel show that people

do not always recognize what they see.

This is not just because they forget.

In the first reading people did not recognize Jesus

because he did not fit their expectations.

Peter had to spell it out for them, make connections,

and then finally some did get it.

On the road to Emmaus,

those disciples did not get it even when Jesus himself spelled it out for them.

It was not until the breaking of bread

that they could recognize what they were seeing.

So it is with us today.

Something has happened to us: Baptism and Confirmation.

It has opened our eyes, and as a result, we can do some recognition.

For some of us it takes awhile.

It takes breaking open the word of God,

and it might even take an experience of the Eucharist;

but we must come to recognition.

We must recognize what it is we see;

recognize who it is we see;

and where it is that we see.

We must not rely on our expectations alone.

Those expectations can easily lead us astray.

We must rely on the Word of God and upon the Eucharistic Breaking of Bread.
We will never be able to recognize the presence of God unless we do so.

It is impossible to see and recognize God present in a tsunami disaster
if our expectation is that God
is only a big benevolent source of good feelings and pleasure.
It is impossible to see and recognize God if our expectation
is that God will do what we want when we want it.
People who have opened eyes can see God in disappoint, disaster, and sadness.
They can recognize God in sickness because they can see God in the sick.
They can recognize God in a tragedy and a disappointment,
because they know the story of Jesus and the fulfillment of the Prophets.
They can recognize God in the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill who wander our streets and sleep
under our bridges
because their eyes have been opened by the Word of God.
They can recognize God in the people beside them in these pews,
before and behind them in the procession to communion,
because with eyes opened,
we can see with recognition the presence of God
who answered the one long and great cry of human the human heart:
“Stay with us.”

We are never alone when we see with recognition
what God has done for us and with us in Jesus Christ.
For this we have every reason to give thanks again today,
to rejoice together in each other,
and to live in hope, in faith, and in confidence
that if we continue to break open the Word of God and Break the Bread of this Eucharist, we shall see
and we shall recognize Him who has come to stay with us through every trial, tragedy, and even death
itself.
Audio Available

Acts 2:14,36-41 + 1 Peter 2:20-25 + John 10:1-10

Fr. Boyer

On Monday I will begin my thirty-eighth year sharing in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It is a thought that brings more memories than you can imagine; but I am not much for looking back except to study where I've been in case I might be going around in circles. I prefer to look ahead, and these are good days for doing that. Only three of those years have passed here in the community of Saint Mark, but when there are only memories left and nothing ahead, I suspect that these years will be among the best, because in the big picture, things only seem to be getting better and because you have been so kind, so positively responsive, supportive, and encouraging. You have prayed me through serious illness, and been more patient with my recovery than me. You have challenged me to hold more firmly to the Word of God, and to celebrate that Word made flesh in the Liturgy, and you have given me reason every day to get up rejoicing. As I give thanks to God this weekend for the voice I heard calling me here, I also give thanks to you. The church always chooses this Sunday as the Day of Prayer for Vocations. I am always at a loss when it comes to finding the words and the way to speak about Vocation, especially a vocation to priesthood. I think it is because it is so profoundly personal, spiritual, and unique. No one ever really gave me a great talk or perfect argument for being a priest. A sister simply said one day: "You ought to be a priest." and along the way, a friend once said when I was thinking of changing the direction of my life: "You have to be a priest - you already are one to me." So, I have never been able to give some convincing insight about this way of life that lately is often so ridiculed and suspect. It just seems best for me to live it out openly, joyfully, sincerely, and personally in the hope that others might see what I perceived in the priests of my past; that it is possible to do this and be this and find yourself again and again standing close to God. That happens, my friends, when I am close to you. So, if God wishes it so, I give you another year of my life freely, gratefully, and joyfully. Thank you for the past 37, and especially I thank those of you who have known me for many of those years. As God said in Genesis, "It is Good."

I am going to be very brief this morning with one simple insight into this Gospel because I want you to give some time and attention to someone coming after Communion. With an image so powerful, sentimental, and well known, this Gospel is loaded with issues to tease out and ponder. It gets even more profound when it is anticipated as we have with the Twenty-third Psalm. Yet, think of this..... John is writing his Gospel to a community that is filled with dissenting voices. He describes them as thieves and robbers. They are likely inauthentic leaders, whose voices and directions do not lead to salvation.

This Gospel speaks just as clearly to us as to those second and third generation followers of Christ. There are too many voices. There are too many ways to go in this life; too many gates, too many paths, too many glittering, promising options that lead us no where but deeper into loneliness, emptiness, and need.

One voice, one way, one shepherd leads, protects, supplies our need. It is nothing we can buy or earn. When you start to listen to that voice and silence all the other voices, you begin to ask what God is saying and what God's wants from you. Young people begin to view their future in terms of what God asks them to do with their gifts and offers with the opportunities that unfold before them. They are no longer interested in how much money they make, what car they can drive, or where they live. They are simply interested in and concerned about how to make a difference in this life and lead others to the

gate of this Gospel figure. Those of us who are further along in life have the same concern and focus, but our resources are real, not yet to come; and so we ask, wonder, and pray about what to do best with what we already have, how to use our very real opportunities, time, talent, and money to open the gate of this Gospel wider for ourselves and others.

For all of us, only deliberate, daily attentiveness to the authentic voice of God will keep us clear about which voice is God's and what will lead us by the Spirit to holiness and everlasting life.

Audio Available

175

Fifth Sunday of Easter Season

4/24/2005

Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

Fr. Boyer

We have passed through a very significant time
that is ripe with opportunities.

In the grand scheme of things however, it is a blink in history.

It would be prideful on our part
to suggest that is "best of times" or the "worst of times."

It is simply the only time we have,

and we did not get here without a lot of good times and bad times.

What is most extra ordinary is that at this time there is this globalization
unknown before in human history.

We are becoming one human family.

The age of media communication, with it's images and voices makes it so.

While an unprecedented experience unfolds for us in an instant,
it brings with it a new level of experience and with it a challenge that is timeless.

In years past, Popes died and were elected over there
before people 10,000 miles away every heard about it.

What has taken place in Rome this month
has taken place in every room where there is a television.

Suddenly the clock or the position of the sun means nothing.

There is no time. People were watching a funeral
in the morning, the afternoon, and the middle of the night.

They were watching a chimney at breakfast, dinner, and bed time.

It was an experience shared in every language and on every continent.

It unified and focused the attention of the world for a brief moment
on something other than war, natural disaster, and scandal.

As I have reflected on my own experience of this,
some parts of it in a foreign country,

I think we are getting a sense of what Pentecost was like for the apostles.

That language thing with them is even part of our experience.

But the biggest issue the events of the past month raises
concerns our identity and what it means to be church.

There is risk involved in sitting with the images we have seen this month
if we fail to ask what it means.

If someone were to simply look at the screen

and fail to ask what it means, they would be left to think that all of this
commotion, all of these people, all of pageantry and celebrated tradition,

with its music and costumes and customs and language is about a man from Bavaria who is now called
Benedict.

It's not about him. It's about us, because it's about church.

Luke, in the first reading today reminds us of what it means to be a church.

He reminds us that service is an essential constituent of church

service to God, service to the word, service to one another,

and in particular, service to the poor and the disadvantaged.

We gather here close to the Feast of the Ascension - about to recall that mystery of Christ's presence and absence. Addressing that experience to his disciples, Jesus promised that they (meaning we would do the works he did and works far greater than his. He left us an agenda to be accomplished in the interim between his advents Part of that agenda is to continue being a church who fully and truly reflects the loving concerns of Christ for humankind. The truth that springs from Pentecost and was affirmed by the last Council is that you, lay people do not belong to the church, nor do you have a role in the church, you are the church. The risk we face with all the images on television this month is thinking that one man is the church, when in fact, that crowd in Saint Peter's Square, and everyone of us there vicariously through the media are the church, filled with the Holy Spirit and enlivened by God's gifts of faith, hope, and love. Endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, everyone of you shares in the threefold office of Christ: priestly, prophetic, and royal. The people of God enjoy true equality, genuine freedom, profound dignity, global responsibility, a sense of vocation, and a personal union with Christ and his mission. Everyone one of you has a proper and indispensable share in the mission of the church that no one else can fulfill. "Let someone else do it." is not an acceptable attitude, because what you fail to do, no one else can do.

On Monday, some of our finest young people will stand around this altar to be CONFIRMED in this faith, in this unique relationship with Jesus Christ as a church. It will be a true and authentic Pentecost in this place, a moment of transformation, of inspiration, and rebirth. They shall become what we have all been called to be: church, ecclesia, holy people whose lives bear witness to presence and power of God. As thousands came to faith and were baptized on that first Pentecost, so it can be again because of the unique and awesome experience of this past month. Millions of people have seen us, become curious, and they are asking questions about us as a church, and we must not miss this opportunity to share what we have, bring them to this place, and open their lives to the Gospel and the fullest relationship with Christ the Risen Lord. There is no one in this church who has not had someone say to them this month: "What do you think of the new Pope?" or "Wasn't John Paul great?" Behind that question and the experience that gives to rise to it is an opportunity, because this whole experience has not been about John Paul or Benedict. It is about us. No one should be left uninvited or feel unwelcome in the kingdom of God as we live it in this church.

Audio Available

176

Sixth Sunday of Easter

5/1/2005

Acts 8:5-8,14-17; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21

Fr. Boyer

“Notebook” is the name of a movie released this past year that drifted through my mind as I sat with these verses of John’s Gospel through the past week. Sometimes the complexity, the developing theology,

the profound and unique Christology of John’s Gospel

allows us all to slip past the simplicity and sheer poetry of the verses.

Had I not watched that film one evening with these verses of John’s Gospel fresh in my mind, I probably would have missed it altogether.

These verses are really a poem for lovers.

They reflect a unique style of love rooted in intimacy and profound care.

Those whose only experience of love

is fleeting infatuation or sexual attraction will never get it;

but those who have discovered in love

the bonding of companionship and union

recognize that these verses literally sing of union and peace of love and joy.

This kind of love the poet John is writing about possess four qualities:

obedience, companionship, revelation and union.

Unfortunately in our culture and language,

the word Obedience carries far too many meanings,

because having lost our knowledge of the root of words

we often fail to rediscover their authentic meaning.

In the context of Love, and religion for that matter,

“Obedience” is not about following orders nearly as much as it is about listening, about the ability to be open to listen to the authentic invitations for life

and respond in a way that is consistent with our own identity.

The root meaning, and so virtue of Obedience is about listening and responding.

Companionship heralds the authentic commitment of love.

When there is love, there is commitment,

and in this commitment, the focus is the other, their well-being,

the desire to help them grow.

The miracle of this love is that two individuals who have first cared only for themselves and have seen themselves as individuals

begin to protect, touch, and think only of another.

Then in this authentic gospel love, there is revelation

that means transparency and vulnerability based on trust.

When someone discovers that they are cared for,

they risk revealing more of themselves.

This love that Jesus speaks of

to those who choose a life style fit for the Kingdom of God is inclusive. It is not experienced and expressed in the same depth by everyone, but it is seen in people joined together in obedience, companionship. They care for one another, and in that caring, God is revealed.

The love our poet writes of today is the love we find at the heart of our lives. Our knowledge of God and God's love comes to us through our experience of love in creation; in the experience of loving and being loved by the other. Husbands and wives know this best of all, and for that reason, their experience of love is a Sacrament that reveals God's love and makes them one with God. Children know this love from their experience of loving parents who give them the freedom to grow without fear because they are cared for, protected with a love that is truly sacrificial.

The wonder of God's love is that it does not ask us to choose between God and the other. It asks us to choose God through the other. Our very ability to live in obedience, companionship, revelation and union with ourselves and others is founded on and strengthened by God's love.

In the film, "Notebook", a wife of many years suffers from dementia, and she has lost all recognition of her loved ones except for brief moments when her memories are ignited by a loving spouse who reads to her every day from his journal. There are brief and fleeting moments of recognition that give him reason to live in the nursing home with her, treasuring those memories and moments of "obedience" and companionship. This is a metaphor of God's love for us, the story of God's patient willingness to live with us, to retell and to remember the story of our love over and over; because from time to time we wake up and remember, restore and celebrate the covenant we have made and share.

The poem of this day's Gospel speaks of that love, of the promise of presence in a relationship of obedience, companionship, revelation, and unity. For this love we have reason to rejoice today, to give thanks, because we are cared for and protected with a love that is truly sacrificial.

Audio Available

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

Fr. Boyer

In spite of our privacy fences and gated communities, security codes and monitored security systems, boundaries of geography or politics mean less and less these days.

The world is shrinking.

While we tighten our borders to keep some out,
we wave others through with a wink and glance the other way
to fill low paying jobs.

For anyone who has traveled abroad in the last ten years,
the borders between ancient countries in Europe are now simply signs on "auto routes" and "auto
bhans" like signs to our north that say: "Welcome to Kansas." Boundaries mean little. They are in flux all
the time.

What separates us is artificial and sometimes it is imposed by incomplete understanding.

This fact sunk into my mind this month as I have read an interesting book about the Versailles Treaty
and the consequences of the First World War.

Most of our political and national strife in the past fifty years finds its origins in the lines the western
allies drew on maps in 1919.

They just didn't get it.

With incomplete understanding, worn out from the violence and killing of that war, they rushed to settle
things with boundaries that failed to take into consideration many factors of history, language, ethnic
and tribal communities.

Iraq is just one of the consequences of boundaries they made up in 1919. Boundaries between people
are in flux. What separates us is totally artificial.

The Ascension of the Lord is about what unites us, and tells the story of how God feels about
boundaries.

While told in Biblical language and with biblical images,
what is really going on here is the breaking of a boundary.

Christ's ascension is the dissolution of the last boundary that keeps us from what we are called to be
and from where we are called to be.

What that early church discovered after the resurrection was that where God was concerned, there
were no more boundaries.

As Paul put it after he caught on:

"no more Jew, no more Greek, no more male nor female."

The communities themselves discovered this when the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles began to
collapse as the inclusive nature of the Lord's Table and the Gospel message was appreciated.

It all began as the biggest of all boundaries came down on the day of the Annunciation when young
Mary in Nazareth said yes to the divine visitor who came to announce the end of the boundary.

"The Word was Made Flesh".

The boundary between heaven and earth was ended with the Incarnation when God crossed the
boundary between heaven and earth.

When the perfect obedience of His Son was complete,

the last remnant of that boundary came down in a moment more powerful than the collapse of the Berlin Wall or the “Iron Curtain”.

A human being crossed the boundary of death to life and of earth to heaven.

With that, it was all over for walls, boundaries, fences, and anything else that keeps people apart and people from God.

This is what we celebrate today in our Christian tradition,
the crossing of the boundary, the end of the limits,
the collapse of anything that keeps us from the presence of God.

And so, what matters today, in our life time, in this age of history
is not what separates us, but what unites us:

our life in God through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

We cannot be faithful to Christ and this plan of God and willingly settle for boundaries that divide and separate.

As he crossed the last boundary,

the risen Christ who had already left behind the boundaries of human flesh and blood gave a final instruction and mandate to those who would follow him across the divide.

They were to translate words into works, decisions into deeds,
and goals into achievements.

Cheap talk was to become precious action.

There were walls to take down, fences to remove, bridges to mend,
and a divine plan for creation to complete.

It is our mission,

our purpose in life,

and it becomes more than our vision,

it becomes our very identity, who we are and what we are:

healers, forgivers, builders, disciples – regardless of the name or what we are called, the mission is the same.

As we stand between the two advents of God,

we are not called to stand back and critique the world.

We are sent into it to prepare

for the final perfection of this world as the Paradise, Heaven, the Kingdom of God.

Audio Available

178

First Holy Communion

5/7/2005

Exodus 16:2-4&12-15; Luke 9:11-17

Fr. Boyer

It is a pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you who are guests with us this morning; especially those of you who are god-parents, and grandparents.

I want those of you who are here for their First Communion to stand up now, and I want you to clap for our guests to show them you are grateful.

There is too much energy and excitement in this church to speak for long, and our class is too big to gather closer and communicate any more personally. Besides, it is Jesus who needs to speak to us today, God's Word made Flesh who comes to feed us.

I commend you who are parents for your efforts to keep the promise you made at the Baptism of your children which allows God to keep the promise God made to us. You have led them and taught them to confess their sins and trust in God's mercy through the Church's prayer of Absolution.

Now you have led your children into this church and to this altar.

But you are not finished.

Now you must lead them in a way of life that is consistent with the Gospel and faithful to the church's tradition which will lead them into the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It will be a long lesson and journey.

Their years of adolescence will be turbulent and trying, but you do not do this alone, and so you must remain close to the family of faith and rely upon the help, example, and support of your brothers and sisters who gather here with you week after week, and you must bring your children with you.

The day will come when you lead them again into this Church for Confirmation and full incorporation into the community of faith celebrating the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then you will do it once more when you lead them down this aisle

and place them in the hands and heart of another who will be their spouse until death. It may also be possible that you might lead them down an aisle to give them to Christ in his service for ministry in the church.

Either way, you are not finished today, no matter how good it feels to be here.

Stay ready for more.

Now I speak to those of you who come to receive for the first time the Body and Blood of Christ. Please stand.

Deacon Byron just proclaimed the Gospel story that remembers how Jesus feeds his people. A couple of weeks ago, I met with you in Founders Hall and told you the story of how God with the help of Moses led his chosen people from Egypt to the Promised Land. I told you about how those chosen people made ready and how they remembered that wonderful day. Now it is time for us to remember and to Pass over; to take the special bread and the blood of the lamb and remember Jesus, God's Son, who leads us through the desert of this life to the promised land of heaven. While they were in the desert, God fed the people every day.

It was just a little bit – just enough for the day. They were not supposed to take more than they needed for one day, and God never left them hungry.

It is the same for us. Today you will receive the Body of Christ, the Holy Eucharist. It looks like that special bread the Hebrew people used for remembering the Passover. It is just a little bit, just enough for today. God will feed you every time you come to his table. You never need more, because God will always give you more of what you need. So there is no need in this life to store up anything God gives you or to take more than you need. There is no reason to hide any or take more than your share unless you don't believe in God's love.

Today is your Passover – your day to hear God calling you, your day to begin to follow the pillar of fire, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Follow him.

Listen to him.

Obey him.

He will lead you.

He will feed you.

He will protect you.

You are children of the Light.

Made Holy by your Baptism and now today, made even more precious by the gift of Christ's' Body and Blood.

God gives you more than that however.

God gives you the mission of Jesus, so that you can complete his work on earth.

You must be bringers of peace, of joy, and love.

Turn to your parents right now and hug them because God loves them and wants them to know it.

No Audio Available

179

Pentecost

5/15/2005

Acts 2:1-11 + 1 Corinthians 12:3-7&12-13 + John 20:19-23

Fr. Boyer

In the next three weeks, we shall celebrate three gifts:

The Gift of the Spirit

The Gift of Relationship

The Gift of Food

The Church calls these:

Pentecost

Holy Trinity

Corpus Christi in the old language, and Body and Blood of Christ in today's.

It is Paul in that first letter to the Corinthians who makes this week's gift most obvious. He insists that the Spirit is given to each member of the community not just a few leaders or gifted prodigies.

All are gifted not for their own personal enjoyment or enlightenment, but for the good of all.

Yet somehow in our competitive driven world, it is always the gifts of other that get our attention either by way of admiration or by way of envy.

Knowledge of the gifts of others may enrich our lives from time to time, especially when their gifts are used for the good of all.

But ignoring our own gifts because we have our eye on the gifts of others is not just foolish. It is wrong.

It robs us of life, and it diminishes the glory and generosity of God.

The opportunity we have this week from the Word we proclaim is not to sit here and imagine what happened in Jerusalem a long time ago; nor guess what tongues of fire look like, or how that language thing worked.

This day is about gifts, our gifts, and not just those seven we memorized at the time of our Confirmation. It is about the gifts we often take for granted, or wrongly assume are just for us for our comfort, entertainment, or security.

The Corinth Paul writes to could just as well be Norman, Oklahoma.

It was a wealthy place.

It was full of pretty people who looked good, had a lot of stuff, and were very, very comfortable and secure when they were not worried about how to keep it all.

They were a people who were smart, educated, had options, and used them.

Paul was writing to you and me.

He writes to any people who have come to faith;

to people who say: "Jesus is Lord."

But for his contemporaries saying those three words amounted to treason.

To publicly proclaim Jesus as "Lord" is to declare that Caesar is NOT!

So we are left to wonder what it means for us,
for people who put those words on bumper stickers, banners, and bracelets.

That proclamation is not about an idea, it announces a way of life.
It does not describe Jesus nearly as much as it says who we are,
how we live our lives, define our values, and inform our decisions.
Just as much today as it was then, saying that "Jesus is Lord"
may cost us our jobs, some relationships, some prestige in the eyes of others.
It will mean we see things differently than others,
value different things, and use our time and all our gifts first of all for others
since we know they have not been given to us for anything
other than the good of all.

We will begin to get the point when the teachings of Jesus Christ show up in our lives not as ideals to
strive for but as principles and values by which we live now.
To think of them as ideals is to build ourselves an excuse for not embracing them now. We have no
excuse. We have no reason for settling for less or pretending that what Jesus has given us, taught us,
and shown us is beyond human reach.

If we dare to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, then we know and acknowledge that what we have in
faith makes all things possible:

Justice,

Peace,

Charity,

Forgiveness,..... it's all there. It is not beyond our reach.

These things are all the consequence of living as if Jesus was Lord.

They are the consequence of living with the wisdom and the knowledge
that all we have is pure gift, and not one of those gifts is our own.

What a difference it shall make when we all get that right!

On that day, we shall truly be able to say:

Christ has died.

Christ is Risen.

Christ HAS come again.

Audio Available

180
Holy Trinity
5/22/2005

Fr. Manuel

Audio Available

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16 + 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 + John 6:51-58

Fr. Boyer

The feasts of Pentecost, Trinity, and the Body and Blood of Christ belong together. The wisdom of our church in grouping them peels back layers of wonder about God's Love and God's presence. As I said on the Feast of Pentecost, what we celebrate these weeks before we settle into Ordinary Time is the wonder of three gifts: each unique yet part of God's self gift to us. Reflection on them individually and collectively leads us deeper in the mystery of God's presence and plan for our salvation.

That first gift of the Spirit awakened us to a world outside our expectations, outside the boundaries of our culture and language; outside our locked up rooms, gates, and fears.

The second from last week's Feast of the Trinity is the Gift of Relationship. Healthy, human growth, physical, emotional, and spiritual is impossible without human contact. Our joy on the feast of the Trinity is that God has invited us in, into the dynamic life-giving relationship of a family where accepted as we are in love, we may grow to become what we are called to be: children of God, heirs of the heaven, and brothers and sisters of Jesus.

The third of these great gifts is ours to ponder today: The Gift of Nourishment.

At the end of the Second World War, young boys recruited as children into the Gestapo were without and food and shelter, lost from their families, and totally helpless when the war suddenly ended and the institution that fed them collapsed. In tent cities and bombed out buildings, doctors and nurses worked with them to restore their mental, emotional, and physical health.

In that image, think of the gift of Spirit, of Relationship, and Nourishment.

It seems that many of the boys would awaken several times during the night screaming in terror. One doctor had an idea for handling their fears. After serving the boys a hearty meal, he would tuck them into bed with a piece of bread in their hands that they were told to save until morning. The boys began to sleep soundly after that because, after so many years of hunger and uncertainty about their next meal, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day.

In a few moments, you will put out your hand and receive bread that you know is more than the answer to your prayers for "daily bread."

You will put out your hands to receive a gift that can keep you from worry and fear about tomorrow, a gift that can quiet restless nights and quiet fearful dreams.

It is a gift that holds at bay the demons of fear and want, and lets you live serenely each day and sleep soundly through each night.

The gift of this bread however does not come without challenge. The offer of this bread or "flesh for the life of the world" caused consternation, dissent and divisions among his contemporaries. They questioned and quarreled over it and some parted company. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the reference is always to "food and drink". In John it is "flesh and blood", a startling and troubling difference for the Jews of his time. Eating flesh and drinking blood were as abhorrent to Jews as the notion of cannibalism would be to us. Yet in the Jewish writings, flesh and blood were the way of describing human life, meaning the real person. And so we must hear this gospel with all the intended meaning of the

scriptures,
and not be tempted to distance ourselves from the reality of what Jesus says
by sacramentalizing or turning this into something that is just a sign or a symbol.

This is where we meet the Jesus of the cross, the risen Christ and the exalted Lord for all eternity. We meet and we commune with one another in the hallowed presence of God. We are lost in the Spirit of that God, commune in the relationship of Love that is the Trinity, and in our own flesh in our own blood, and in our own lives, that God takes flesh again. This is the Eucharist, the continual, on going, incarnation of God's human presence, the church.

In a few moment, you will put out your hand to receive this gift.

If you believe what you accept, you will not be the same.

This Eucharist does not invite us to "imitate" Christ.

It is not a proposal that we copy the actions of Jesus – it does not suggest that we ask "What would Jesus do?", but rather it proposes that we imitate his relationship with God and then because of that relationship we will do the right thing, the Will of God.

Jesus proclaimed a new way of life based upon a new relationship with the Father.

He did not propose a new set rules. He gave a new relationship out of which we might begin to live. In that relationship we shall discern the will of God and act upon it, because that is true righteousness. Saying, "Lord, Lord" will get us no where. Even doing mighty works is not the point, no matter how good they are. Only doing the will of God is what matters, and that is only possible for those who live an intimate relationship with God: as intimate as flesh and blood.

In this Year of the Eucharist, proclaimed by our late Holy Father John Paul,
our challenge is not so much to do something
as it is to become something; and that is a lot more difficult.

So, put out your hands and say, "Amen."

But not for a piece of bread or a sip of wine.

Say it for a new life; a new way of life.

Audio Available

Fr. Boyer

Through the month of June, Matthew's Gospel will have Jesus assembling and instructing his apostolic church. This week and next we get the Matthew version of his selection process, and then we finish the month with some initial instructions so that we do not get it wrong about what we are called to do and to become as members of the apostolic church.

The Jesus of Matthew's Gospel invites us into his home. It is a wonderful tiny detail that makes a great difference. Luke has Matthew or "Levi", as he calls him throw a dinner to which Jesus is invited, but the Jesus of Mark and Matthew's Gospel is the divine host who invites the sinner into his home. This revelation of divine hospitality, of God as gracious host who invites and includes everyone is the cause for our joy this day as we sit and wonder at this wonderful turn of events. How unlike us is this great God who has no list of those included and those excluded! How wonderful it is to think that for once in our lives, we need not wonder nor worry about whether or not we are wanted or included, for deep inside us all is that lurking doubt that we will not be chosen, invited, or wanted. All that is wiped away by this Jesus who more than once in Matthew's Gospel invites the unexpected into his home.

It prefigures the church, this assembly where only one thing is asked of us, mercy. That's all he asks: "It is mercy I desire, not sacrifice."

Sacrifice is a complex term in religious vocabulary. Authentic sacrifice reflects what is best about humanity, and the paradigm of Christian love is Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It is crucial though, to discern between a sacrifice freely made out of authentic love which is an act of mercy, and a sacrifice made out of fear or some twisted belief that we have to pay back God for what we've been given or make up for our sins. The truth is, nothing can make up for our sins; and if we have to pay back God for what we have been given, then it would never have been a gift.

That kind of sacrifice threatens to make us hard resentful and self-righteous rather than trusting more deeply in the goodness of God as the source of our well-being and salvation. It can also make us very hard on those we love. It is this kind of sacrifice that Jesus would have none of.

It is mercy he desires, and the lived experience of mercy is the generous and loving gift of one's whole self out of love for another. That is true sacrifice as we see it expressed in the love of Jesus for his Father, and the love of the Father in the sending of his only son to share the totality of the human experience, even helpless, violent death.

The trouble with the Pharisees was that their scrupulous concern to live exactly by the law drew distinctions between people, like the righteous and the sinners. Paul comes along and insists that Abraham was righteous because of his faith in God's promise rather than by following a Law that had not been given yet. If Abraham could be righteous before there was a law, then the law is not the "be all and end all" of what makes someone righteous.

The graciousness of Jesus is our comfort, our joy, and our challenge today. His call for mercy, his inclusive behavior, and his invitation extended to us is what we celebrate around this altar. Your graciousness to each other, your welcome, your openness, your patience, and the hospitality of this

parish is our living of this gospel. The Jesus who looked for people to invite and include lives now in us, and we are unworthy of his presence if we fail to live with that same spirit.

What must make us similar to Jesus is not that we attract people like ourselves, but that we reach across barriers to do so. Jesus reached out to Matthew a tax collector, then to a woman who was bleeding, then to a girl thought to be dead, and all of them bring their friends to meet the one who reached out to them. Out of this process rooted in the ministry of Jesus and practiced in the mission of the church, a new humanity is emerging, and the Lord's table will be finally filled, for many will come from east and west and north and south to eat at the feast of salvation.

Audio Available

Exodus 19:2-6 + Romans 5:6-11 + Matthew 9:39-10:8

Fr. Boyer

“Compassion” is the only word we have in English to translate a Greek word that has far more power than we can imagine in translation. “Empathy” might get closer, and yet that does not quite have the strength and the depth of pity that is there. It describes a kind a movement at the very deepest part of our being. Perhaps the closest we might get to imagining what Matthew is really describing is the depth of emotion and passion that a parent might have at the sight of their child in unimaginable pain or agony. The sight of such a terror would wrench the deepest part of a parent in anguish and sorry. There comes with it the strongest of desires to remove the offence, to take away the pain, to heal the wound, and if that were not possible, to take the agony upon themselves and free the child from the terrible experience. That is getting close to the Greek word that Matthew chooses for this experience. The word is used a couple of times in parables, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke use it only of Jesus, and there are five conditions that move Jesus that powerfully.

Jesus was moved to this compassion by the world’s pain. He could not ever see someone suffering and not ease the pain.

Jesus was moved to compassion by the world’s sorrow. The mere sight of the widow who had lost her only son moved his heart to dry her tears and return the son to her living. She never even asked.

Jesus was moved to compassion by the world’s hunger. The sight of a hungry crowd moved him to search for food and feed. They never asked for a thing. No Christian can be content to have too much while others have too little.

Jesus was moved to compassion by the world’s loneliness. The sight of a leper banished from his own people called forth his power every time he saw it.

Jesus was moved to compassion by the world’s bewilderment. Common people longing for God with the scribes and Pharisees everywhere having nothing to offer led him to every synagogue he could find to offer guidance, and comfort, and strength, and the hope of God’s Word.

This “compassion” that we find in Jesus is not a sentiment, but a tool by which Jesus enters into the very experience that moves him so deeply. He knows pain. He knows sorrow. He knows hunger, loneliness and bewilderment, and with God-like compassion his whole life becomes focused on easing the pain, drying the tears, sharing the food, embracing the outcast, and revealing the presence and power of God’s love. This is what he would have for his apostles.

Take note that while he calls the apostles from among others, the commission they receive is not reserved to a select few. Matthew makes the point that there are twelve of them. For those who receive his Gospel, that number twelve evokes a sense of totality because every Israelite belonged to one of the twelve tribes. The whole nation is called to the mission, and as Matthew prefigures the church as the new Israel, it is you and me whose passions must be stirred at the deepest level by the conditions of life that cause pain and sorrow; hunger, loneliness, and bewilderment.

We are not sent on this mission that gives purpose and focus to our lives just as much as it did to the life of Jesus without the gifts that empower us. That reminder closes this Gospel proclamation today. "Without cost you have received, without cost you are to give." says this translation today. "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift." says another more clearly. "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift." I don't think there is a more powerful, more clear, nor more precise statement in all the New Testament that expresses who we are and why we are here.

But our Christian history is littered with grave and disappointing examples of failure because of our possessiveness and sense of entitlement. Religious people must be reminded of this truth constantly, that what we have, everything, is nothing but a gift; and that gift has been given for one reason only, to be given away in the same spirit with which it was given. This is the grounding of Christian ministry. Everything we do rests upon a rich sense of gratitude.

Grateful here in this church, we are compassionate there, outside these walls where the sorrowful, the suffering, the lonely, the hungry, and the confused wait for divine mercy. We have the gifts. We have the tools. We have the power to do for them everything Jesus did for those he met day in and day out. What is keeping us from performing the same great signs and wonders that the Kingdom of God is near? Maybe we have hear what He said again in the face of our possessiveness:
"What you have received as gift, give as gift."

Audio Available

184

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time

6/19/2005

Jeremiah 20:10-13 + Romans 5:12-15 + Matthew 10:17-33

Fr. Boyer

“Life is difficult.” says Scott Peck in the opening line of his famous book: *The Road Less Traveled.*”

He claims that there are two kinds of people in the world:

those who know life is difficult and come to terms with it and

those who never understand that life is difficult and are drowned in its waters.

The healthy know that life is difficult.

Jeremiah is healthy, and Jesus would have his disciples be healthy as well.

In these verses from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus continues his formation program for those he has just called and is sending on mission.

He would have them be healthy.

The story of Jeremiah and the story of the one whose Psalm we have sung today

bear witness not simply to the difficulty of life,

but to the presence of God in the midst of their distress,

and that is the point of Matthew’s instruction.

Those of you who read along or who have looked ahead at the text have noticed that I chose to add several verses and proclaim the entire section of Matthew’s instruction, because in it, the only mention of the work of the Spirit in the life of disciples that occurs in Matthew’s entire Gospel.

Since it is the only time Matthew writes of the Holy Spirit this way, it is extremely significant, and it casts a light on this matter that is essential.

It is this gift that will tell them what to say.

It is this gift that will give them courage.

It is this gift that will take away all fear.

What is truly remarkable and tragic about the persecutions

that both Jeremiah and Jesus’ disciples experienced

is that the persecution did not originate from an outside source.

It came from within the community of faith!

Jeremiah was persecuted by his fellow countrymen of Judah.

The disciples of Jesus were persecuted by their fellow Jews.

These readings offer a look at what happens when a community of faith turns on itself and refuses to listen to the prophetic voices in their midst.

It is what happens when fear gains control:

fear of change, fear of growth, fear of what is different, unknown, unexpected.

Fearless then is the disciple of Jesus, and because of it, they are free.

In the spirit of that freedom a virtue emerges

that gives a disciple a focus and a future.

When Jesus says to his disciples that he has “Come to set the world on fire.” He knows what he is about.

Anyone who speaks that way knows who they are and what their purpose in life may be. I call that: “ZEAL”.

It does not mean becoming a fanatical zealot.

It means that the disciple is one whose life has meaning, purpose, and destiny.

It is a virtue rooted in an expectation that something is asked of us, that there is purpose to our lives, and a destiny to which we are called.

The zealous are focused on the direction of their lives, their future, their purpose and their goal.

For a disciple of Jesus Christ, for anyone Baptized into his Life, that destiny is the Kingdom of God, and nothing else is a substitute.

They are headed that way with a sense of urgency and purpose.

They know how to get there, and they know what gets in the way.

The purpose of their life is not a six figure salary, a particular model of car, or house in any certain neighborhood.

It is the Kingdom of God, and there is about these people a certain kind of vibrant vitality that is eager and expectant for the Lord's return.

They are joyful, prayerful, focused people who know what matters and what does not.

What they do is consistent with Jesus Christ, His life, His mission, His teaching, and most of all, His relationship with God.

In short, it the "Godly Life."

I think it is best learned from the Life of Moses, who in Matthew's Gospel is the model for the life of Jesus, and therefore for his disciples.

The story of Moses in the Old Testament is the story of Discouragement and Depression, of being Misunderstood and Misrepresented, of temptation to Resentment and Revenge, yet he rose over all of that.

What he learned, Jesus learned, and so must we.

The Godly life is never easy. Rewarding, Yes. Fulfilling? Yes, Worthwhile? A thousand times yes, but never easy. Those with thin skin should beware. Those with hard hearts are a danger. A spiritual director once told me that maturity was evident when thin skin and a hard heart were replaced by tough skin and a soft heart.

The invitation we have in Matthew's gospel is an invitation to grow up and live it up. The life we are promised is a life of excitement and promise.

It is a life of ups and downs, but a life in which the ups gradually and steadily outnumber the downs.

We are invited to lose our lives, but you can't lose your life if you do not live it.

Finding is losing.

Lose yourself, find God.

That is what a real disciple does who has no fear.

Moses traded all the perks, power, and pleasure of this world for a reward in an invisible realm. He traded it all for a relationship with the living God.

It was the best trade anyone could have made, and Jesus did the same.

What they lost, they could not have kept anyway.

What they gained they could never lose.

Thus it shall always be in the kingdom of the Crucified and Risen One.

Audio Available

185
13th Sunday of Ordinary Time
6/26/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

186

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

7/3/2005

Zechariah 9:9-10 + Romans 8:9, 11-13 + Matthew 11:25-30

Fr. Boyer

Since I am assuming no one arrived here this morning by horse or by colt the difference between the two modes of transportation has likely escaped us.

The prophet Zechariah proposes that the messiah, the "savior" will arrive on a donkey, not a horse, and for those of his time this is something unexpected.

This is news. For us, the story of Palm Sunday has dulled the impact of this message, especially so if the significance of the animal is not understood.

Historians tell us that in the ancient world, donkeys were symbols of peace, as opposed to the horse, which was used for war.

Riders of donkeys in the Jewish scriptures were regarded as distinguished and even majestic.

In his prophesy, Zechariah proposes that the rider of the donkey will be a non violent peacemaker through whom justice will be universally established.

The horse will be banished.

For the people of his time, this was unexpected news, and a whole new idea. Because of their recent oppression in exile,

they expected a messiah on a horse

that would violently destroy all enemies in the style of King David.

It was not to be.

The intelligent and the learned do not get it.

Something new has come, and they don't want it.

They can't understand it.

They didn't think of it first, and they will have nothing to do with it, so they ran the risk of missing the opportunity.

Jesus suggests that they are like children in the market place,

where they refused to dance with the flute and refused to mourn with the dirge. Suspicious and unwilling, they will not give the Kingdom of God a chance.

It asks more of them than they can imagine, and so it passes them by.

Stories of missed opportunities abound in history.

Thomas Edison spent only three months in formal education because a teacher thought he was dull.

So he started reading on his own discovering literature, philosophy, and science.

The "lights" went on and he literally changed the course of history, but not because of the intelligent, the learned and the clever.

It was the same with Galileo who mastered the grinding of lenses for glasses and telescopes.

He confirmed the earlier thought of Copernicus that the sun was fixed and earth moved around it.

But the wise and the learned were threatened by new information and silenced both Copernicus and Galileo.

This behavior continues to wear away at news of the Reign of God.
“These things” which are being revealed can be grasped by the mind of a child
while people of influence and power never get it.
“These things” refer to the mysteries of the Kingdom
and how the grace of the Father reaches down
through Jesus to hearts that are open and hungry for transformation.
Resistance to what is new, to these mysteries springs from fear
that worldviews must change and the landscape of one’s life must shift.
For the learned and the clever,
for those in power and those with all the answers, this is far too risky;
but not to the childlike who are open to the fresh air of the Divine Spirit
that was blowing in their midst.

The troubles Jesus had with proclaiming a new message
are the troubles Christ still has today.
Our sense of the Kingdom of God, I images for what it shall be like,
and our sense of how it shall come to be
are still not open enough to allow it to happen.
Extremism continues to push us apart into suspicious and mean spirited opponents
who can no longer imagine the unity of the human family.
A change of mind, of values, of opinions or of ideas is looked upon as a weakness
or flaw of character.
When in fact, openness to change, to conversion, or rethinking opinions in the face of facts is exactly
what it takes for the Spirit to move us toward the Reign of God.
Issues of peace, violence, the death penalty, the dignity of life, capitalism, and even democracy are
obvious issues where the Spirit can lead and call for change in some hearts that are closed and will not
listen.
There are issues in our church as well
and sometimes they threaten the unity of parish communities.
Language, vesture, hymn books, (for heaven’s sake) translations, governance, posture, the integration
and preservation of one’s rights and the exercise of one’s duties too often give evidence that the trouble
Jesus had is still a trouble today.

Around this altar because of this Gospel and Matthew’s words, we might well look not at each other,
but at ourselves and resistance with us that delays the coming the Kingdom of God. It isn’t a matter of
time. It is a matter of will, of desire, and of faith.
What we wait for is not another day, another year, nor another generation;
but for our own hearts to change so that we might dance with the piper
and mourn with the dirge.
When the day comes that we desire to change ourselves
consistently and completely
into an unmistakable image of Christ,
we will finally know what it is to be meek and humble of heart
and the Spirit of God will dwell within us.
Audio Available

187

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/10/2005

Isaiah 55:10-11 + Romans 8:18-23 + Matthew 13: 1-23

Fr. Boyer

This is a parable of promise, not a parable of judgment.

It is about what will come to be, not about the past.

We need no parables to tell us about that.

But because of the past in which we live minute by minute,
we do need to hear about what will come,

what is God's will, and how to accomplish that will.

And so Matthew gives us this parable on the lips of Jesus.

We begin to get the point as we listen to the prophet today
speaking of how certain and effective God's Word has become.

As sure as rain, sun, and seed make harvest,
so it shall be with the Word of God.

It will bear fruit.

The seed Jesus sews will bear fruit,

but this harvest does not happen in the gospel narrative.

When Matthew's Gospel concludes, disciples are sent out to all nations to continue scattering the seeds.

What we do get in the Gospel is the failure of the seed to flourish:

Fleeing disciples who are ashamed and afraid of Jesus;

betrayal by Peter whose name is "rock" by the way, and Judas;

a rich young man who has been given everything will give up nothing.

All of these failures are summed up in three images worth looking at and reflecting upon in the midst of
summer.

Perhaps a glance at them today will give us some thought about how we might make more certain that
the promised harvest will happen in our lives.

The image of the well – worn path is powerful when we consider how it contributes to the failure of the
harvest. Too busy, too stuck in the ruts and habits of our lives, the planted seed, the gifts we are given
bear no fruit. Busy in the fast lane is the life of those who are here today and gone tomorrow. All that
can be expected of these people so busy with their lives is that we can hope for nothing except more of
the same.

The image of the rocky ground is just as powerful to express what happens when the Word of God is
sown into a hardened heart. These hearts, as I spoke of last week, cannot change. No conversion, so
response, just stone cold silence, stubbornness, and certitude that I am right and my way is the only
way. No harvest here.

The final image suggests a condition too common and pervasive in our culture: the shallow ground.
These hearers have so many interests in life, so much to do, so many to please! Their priorities are all a
jumble. Their prayer is shallow. The commitment is convenient, and when more is asked or expected, it is
replaced by something or someone else.

But there is also the good ground, and the promise it holds.
So we tell the parable again
to encourage ourselves with the promise it proclaims,
to look at the conditions
into which this Word and Promise have been sewn,
and perhaps rejoice and receive the blessing we hear
from the lips of Jesus;
a blessing upon those who have eyes to see
and ears to hear.

Audio Available

188
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
7/17/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

I Kings 3:5,7-12 + Romans 8:28-30 + Matthew 13:44=52

Fr. Boyer

Three parables conclude the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel.

The parables are about the Kingdom of Heaven.

To make sure we get it, Matthew says it three times:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like....."

And then he asks the question worth asking again and again:

"Do you understand?"

I think the question and the struggle for the answer is the issue with this Gospel when we proclaim it in Norman, Oklahoma on a hot July weekend.

"Have you understood all this?" he asks after to speaking to them about treasures buried in fields, merchants searching for pearls, and nets that collect fish?

"Yep, we sure do." they say, and then the evidence begins to pile up against them.

Because I know how it will go with them, I'm not so quick with my answer, and I wonder about you.

I'm not so sure I do understand.

I'm caught between wanting to say that I do in order to appear wise and knowledgeable, and wanting to cry out:

"I don't get it. Tell me again. Help me understand!"

Perhaps that was Solomon's greatest gift:

knowing that he didn't know it all,

and asking to have an understanding heart.

With that desire, we might take a second look at these parables from another point of view.

There is another way to imagine these parables that might lead to deeper understanding.

Something about our life style and the power-driven western world always pushes us to think that the parables are giving us instructions about what to do or telling us how to do something.

What if we switch from the active to the passive?

What if these are really parables that describe the Kingdom of Heaven?

What if these are parables that describe

how we shall be in this "now and not-yet existence we call "the present?"

It is, after all, our built in impatience with being in the "now and not yet"

that makes us want to do something

often at the cost of being something.

In the end, I think the reason we have

and have preserved these parables and words of Jesus

are to give us something to imagine and long for while we wait.

They actually tell us how to BE in this world

just as much as they tell us what to DO.

In fact, what we DO must flow from what we ARE.

So, instead of hearing these parables as instructions about what to do, listen again and think about what else they have to tell us. Perhaps these parables have something to say about God. The Kingdom of Heaven is like the TREASURE. That's what the parable is about, not about the person. It's about being sought, being desired above all things, about being wanted enough to sell everything in order to be possessed. Then the Kingdom of Heaven is about the MERCHANT who sells everything to get that pearl. Finally, the Kingdom of Heaven is about the NET that gathers every kind of fish! With that said, suppose the first parable is about us: the greatest treasure in God's eyes. Suppose the second parable is about God who sells or gives his only Son in order to have us as God's own. Finally, suppose the third parable is about church, the net of love that gathers us all and leaves no one behind.

"Do you understand this?"

Do any of us ever really understand that we are treasures that God desires more than anything?

Do any of us ever really get it?

Do we ever grasp what a price has been paid for us and our salvation?

Are we ever going to see that all of us are in this net of love together?

Once we do,
the gift of wisdom and real understanding will be ours,
and the cry of Joy from the one who has found us
will echo through all creation
and once again it will be a beginning,
a Genesis,
and we and all creation shall be GOOD.

Audio Available

190
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
7/31/2005

Fr. Nicholas

No Audio Available

191

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

8/7/2005

1 Kings 19:9, 11-13 + Romans 9:1-5 + Matthew 14:22-33

Fr. Boyer

We do not hear anything to indicate that the storm is what frightened the disciples.

These are fishermen.

They are on the lake every day and every night.

They know it well.

They know its moods and its weather.

They know how to handle the boat.

There is no hint of fear in this story until they see Jesus walking on the water.

They thought they were seeing a ghost, and it scared them.

They were a people simpler than we are.

If we saw someone walking on the water, we would start to wonder how they did that.

We would suspect some techno – hologram at work, and the curious would get interested. The rest of us would just go back to work.

But, what if we saw someone we knew was dead walking toward us?

Now remember, this story is being told by a people who have experienced the death and resurrection of Jesus.

More than anything, this story at this point of Matthew's Gospel is theophany story in which the divinity of Jesus is revealed.

The evidence of that comes when Jesus speaks and says:

Get hold of yourselves. It is I.

In the original language of this Gospel, these are words straight out of the Book of Exodus – I AM WHO I AM says the voice from the burning bush.

So the first thing we get on an August Sunday from Matthew's Gospel is an affirmation about the identity of Jesus Christ.

The next thing we get is a description of his function – what he is here to do.

This Divine Messiah is here to save humankind.

In chapter eight there is another boat story

about a sleeping Jesus and a violent storm that is sinking the boat.

In that story, no one gets out of the boat, while Jesus calms the storm.

It concludes with the apostles wondering:

What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

In this boat story, they get their answer.

He is none other than the "I AM" who spoke to Moses and called for obedience.

In that story, staying in the boat even if it's battered by storms is the way to get to the other side.

It is a church – story about getting from here to there: from here to the other side.

In both stories, the "little faith" of the disciples is the issue, but the second story has its roots in the resurrection experience,

and so Peter is willing to step out when called.

Had he not taken that first step, he would never have learned the meaning of faith.

Thank God for Peter!

Bounding out of the boat, onto the water.

What an act of faith, and then the sinking, and the panic, and the cry or desperation.

And then the hand extended in a powerful combination,

a kind of incarnation blending of friendship

and salvation,

and encouragement

and life itself.

And then those wonderful words.

I've never thought they were spoken in rebuke or aloof scolding.

I prefer to think that they were spoken with admiration and tenderness.

I think they were whispered, intimate encouragement:

"Oh Little-Faith-One. Why did you doubt?"

Little faith is a marvelous thing.

Just a little will get you out of the boat and onto the water;

and that's the first step sometimes.

It's what Elijah learned at that cave.

It's not the big wind,

the earthquake,

nor the big fire that matters.

It's the tiny whispering voice.

In a world that thinks bigger is better,

might is right, and that being tough and unbending is virtue,

this is a hard thing to get right.

God loves faith in every form, big and little,

and little faith grows into great faith.

Audio Available

Isaiah 56:1,6-7 + Romans 11: 13-15,29-32 + Matthew 15:21-28

Fr. Boyer

In an age when fear tightens our borders,
this Gospel comes with a challenge not to be ignored.
Fear is driving much of our policy, decisions, and attitudes as a nation.
Even as a church, issues of language, sexuality, culture, and life style
threaten to split us into insiders and outsiders.
Gates, Fences, Boundaries, and Borders are getting very important, to the point that some of us are
beginning to wonder if they exist to keep us in or keep us out.
The lines between insiders and outsiders always prove to be problematic.
“You don’t belong here.” or “You can come in, but this is how we do things.”
are the sounds of a circle tightening,
and that tight circle may strangle the life out of us.

Exclusivity does not become us.

The privilege of the covenant does not bestow the right to judge and exclude.
It brings a duty to embrace, to welcome, to seek, and search:
the very divine quality that has embraced us in our faults and failures.
The best lesson and revelation of this story comes from an unlikely source.
The teacher today is not Jesus, nor is it the apostles.
The one who proclaims good news today is the woman
who knows more about God than those apostles.
She knows where to go in her need, and she knows how to get relief.
The power of her persistent plea;
the fact that what she asks is not for her alone;
and the humility with which she takes insult and dismissal
is in sharp contrast to the “in group” apostles who want her sent away.

Another challenge to our culture’s prevailing mood of privilege
comes out of Matthew today
giving us cause to think again about the gifts we have.
None of them were earned, no matter how we may try to fool ourselves with that idea.
They were not earned, because we did not choose where we were born nor when.

As a parent willing to endure anything for her child,
this woman is an image of God for us
revealing Divine qualities in this very human moment.
A woman from Canaan teaches us today about God, about prayer, and about humility.
An outsider, she still believed, and because of it, she was promised,
“Your wish will come to pass.”
She found her place at the table.
Satisfied with crumbs, it is life she seeks.
Even crumbs are part of a loaf that nourishes and sustains.
At this table it is crumbs that sustain us, just a tiny piece broken from the whole.

At this table it is life we seek and life we receive.
Audio Available

193

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

8/21/2005

Isaiah 22:19-12 + Romans 11: 33-36 + Matthew 16:13-20

Fr. Boyer

As many times as I have heard these verses and studied them, something new always pops out when I sit still long enough to listen.

This time around, two things came to my attention:

only in Matthew's Gospel is the word "Church" used with Peter's confession, making it perfectly clear that this is not about Peter, but about us.

The second thing that came to mind was that this business of the keys is about authority not power.

The two are not the same.

The problem with the man in the first reading is that he confused the two.

He had authority, but he thought it was all about power, so he used his authority to exercise power for himself, and that was the end of him.

This year, and especially last week,

we are celebrating one hundred years of what Matthew speaks of in his Gospel.

We sit in this grand church made holy

by the sacrifices of those who put it here and our own to keep it here.

The men and women who were here one hundred years ago may well have imagined and hoped that we would be here, but I wonder if they thought it would look like this?

This celebration of our centennial is about more than looking back with wonder

at how they did it, how they got around, how they managed to survive on this inland sea of grass, and what they managed to build.

This celebration of our centennial eventually must lead us to look ahead at what it will take to have another celebration one hundred years from now.

The reason we are here with a past to celebrate is because those men and women were not part-time Catholics, and matters of convenience never entered their thinking when it came to their faith and how it was celebrated.

Closer to the early church and the ideal of Jesus Christ, there were free riders because membership was expensive.

It offered sacrifice and stigma, but also significance and satisfaction.

In the past hundred years, we have accumulated a lot free riders

who slow things down and lessened the efficacy of the mission.

Calling oneself a Christian is not the same as calling oneself a disciple.

In this part of the world, being a "Christian" is expected and easy,

but becoming a true Disciple of Christ is something else again.

It means being part of the mission, digging into your pockets and into your calendar.

Believing in Christ is not what is required.

Believing Christ is.

Those old timers hitched up the team, loaded up the kids, and took off across streams and grasslands when they heard that Mass was going to happen somewhere.

I doubt that they cared one bit about how long it took, whether Father had an accent, or what kind of

music there might be.

Christ built them into “church”, and that church is what we are.

Day by day we ought to worry about whether or not we are worthy of what we have inherited.

We feel proud of having built one big church.

They built ten times as many in two decades.

What those men and women had to pass on
was authority, not power. They had no power.

The trouble these days is that we do,
and then we get more interested in power than in authority.

When that happens, everything is more important than faith and church,
because we want more power.

And so, getting a better job and making more money
is more important than what we do with it.

We educate our children first so that they can make money, be secure and have stuff
if there is any time left, and it’s convenient, they can learn about church and faith.

Authority is not won by promotion, but by prayer and tears.

Authority is maintained by self-surrender and courageous sacrifice.

We recognize people with authority because they have suffered, sacrificed, and risen up with courage
from challenge and defeat.

We recognize people with authority
because they are not interested in themselves first.

In the synagogue of his home town,
the people recognized authority in Jesus, not power.
They listened and some followed him because of it.

That is what Jesus would give to us,
and that is what church will be built upon for the future:
sacrifice, suffering, courage, and prayer.

These are the ingredients of authority,
exactly what Jesus has to offer those who recognize him as Peter did.

Take a look at the cross again. No hint of power there,
only authentic authority, against which nothing can prevail.

Audio Available

194

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

8/28/2005

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

195

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

9/4/2005

Ezekiel 33:7-9 + Romans 13: 8-10 + Matthew 18:15-20

Fr. Boyer

What is set forth in this Gospel is not merely a matter of charity,
but an absolute ethic by which the community is bound to conduct itself.

Before Moses, the law of retribution was wild and uncontrolled.

I would call it the "law of rage".

If someone shot your dog,

then you burned down their house and barn with all the livestock in it.

We still find this system working these days in conduct called "road-rage".

Some folks have not gotten much past that age of human history.

Then, Moses. In an effort to calm the desert passions of nomadic tribal peoples,

he promulgated a code we called: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth".

It was a brilliant move to limit the extent of damages and control rage.

The violence of terrorists, and our response to them gives evidence that we have not even taken that
code of conduct seriously.

Then, Jesus of Nazareth, who completely abandoned an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and turned
the relationship around.

The Jesus of Matthew's Gospel consistently cast in the image of a new Moses promulgates a new way by
turning the relationship around.

He introduced a different standard:

as you relate yourselves to others,

so God relates to you. Forgiveness is to forgive.

Therefore it follows that those who are forgiven by God are to forgive one another.

The church that gave rise to this Gospel,

the church which focused on the issues raised chapter after chapter

in Matthew's Gospel is painfully revealed here.

It was not all sweet charity and kindness.

It was a community facing conflict, change, disgrace, unfaithfulness,
and the burden of free-riders.

There was friction outside with the Roman and Jewish authorities.

There was friction inside as the growing church sought its identity
as belonging to Jesus distinct from but rooted in Judaism.

They fought it out. They argued.

It is likely that they shouted and pointed, accused and excused.

In an effort to aid and lead the church's self awareness and realization,

Matthew puts forth an ethic and a vision

to motivate behavior based not solely on the Law,

but upon the person and the message of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was a seeker. The verses of today's Gospel ought to be heard with the echo of the verses just
before – in which he speaks of seeking and finding what is lost.

That seeking and passionate desire to be one, to be whole, to be united drives the human spirit touched
by the Holy Spirit.

We must be seekers if we will be part of Jesus Christ.

The opposite of a seeker is a settler, and churches are full of them everywhere.
We have our share here at Saint Mark.
They are pew warmers who settle in,
who come to church with no passionate reason of their own.
Sometimes because they inherited a certain church from their ancestors.
Sometimes because it is the socially acceptable place to be seen.
Sometimes people belong because they are afraid,
and they settle down in church because they fear the great punishment,
or because they long for the great reward.
But for people created in God's image,
it would seem more appropriate to be in church because they are in love.
That kind of real love is only sustained and maintained by forgiveness.

I wonder if you've ever thought about the furniture in this place,
about where you see this kind of seating.
First of all, except for a few trendy restaurants, the only other place you see this seating arrangement
and furniture is in a court room.
Yet again, and even more powerfully, this kind of seating in long rows is found in airports and office
waiting rooms.
On this September weekend, our broken church glues itself back together again.
It is imperfect because we are so.
It has sometimes failed us, and each of us have failed the church.
Yet in the midst of this mutual failure we claim this church
as our own, our home, our mother.
We do not run away when we see through the cracks
and find littleness and greatness, poverty and wealth.
We ought to feel more fed and failed.
But not everyone can say this, and so we are called to great sensitivity.
We are still full of controversy and troubles without and within,
but an end of controversy will not mean success.
As long as love prevails, there is nothing to fear in controversy.
We must accept both the burden and the grace of being Church.
By our assembly week after week we begin again and again with a rite of forgiveness because that is
what we are about.
More and more those who venture in here should be called in love to join the seeking and the waiting.
The simple truth of the matter is that we can do nothing on our own to get to heaven, but if we wait
long enough, God will come and lift us up.
And so we wait, and we seek, and we watch for the day when living forgiveness leads us to find it.
Audio Available

196

24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

9/11/2005

Sirach 27:30-28:9 + Romans 14:7-9 + Matthew 18:21-35

Fr. Boyer

We love to count. Candles on a cake, touchdowns, dollars in the bank!

It's all about numbers. They're neat, easy to measure, and always the same.

One plus one is always two.

Numbers; a great tool, so we make rules that use them:

"Three strikes and you're out."

So Peter is just like us.

He liked to count. He wanted a neat, measurable and consistent rule for forgiveness.

So he asks, "How often shall I forgive?"

He knows the Jewish Law that says brothers and sisters must be forgiven four times.

He also knows that Jesus is always pushing the law one or two steps further.

He knows that "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" is over.

So he guesses, and Jesus knows what he's up to and he tells a story.

An executive for a large corporation was caught embezzling to the tune of \$1,234,500,000.00 When the company realized that selling all the man's assets would never pay the debt, they decided to let him work it off.

Now he made \$50,000 a year after taxes, so the company determined that ninety percent, \$45,000 would be withheld from his pay till the debt was paid.

When the man realized that it would take 2,734 years to pay what he owed, he fell on his knees and begged the company, "Be patient with me and I will pay you everything." Out of pity, the crime was forgiven and he was released from his debt.

That night at the country club, he met a friend who owed him \$6.18 for a previous weekend's game. "Be patient," the friend said. "I'll pay you next week." But the man refused and took his friend to small claims court. When the news got around the office, the company became upset and called the man in, "You wicked man! We forgave you your debt because you begged us. You should have forgiven the \$6.18." And in anger the company contacted the authorities and had the man thrown in prison.

But who is counting? Is it about numbers or is it about something else?

The parable is not about God. It is about us.

It is about a quality of God that God expects to find in God's creation.

It is about mercy in the face of wrong doing.

This "mercy" is not a nice feeling; it is an attitude in action called: "forgiveness."

In a book called: *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott suggests that

Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die."

Of course not many of us would willingly do that thinking the rat is killed,

Yet we gorge ourselves on diets of revenge and hatred,

thinking that such a diet will cause us to thrive and cause our enemies to perish.

After four years of waging war against terrorism, we have to pause and ask ourselves,

"Do we feel safer? Has our anger been satisfied?

Has our vengeance been taken since what happened four years ago today?

Have we thrived? Have our enemies perished?

Is this policy working for us?

Who is going to suffer from our inability to forgive or be more creative about our response to violence than by imitating it?

We profess to be a people whose lives and future, whose vision and faith begins with Easter. It is God's ability to turn death into resurrection that makes us who we are.

The man in the parable remained unmoved by the mercy shown him.

He was, to put it plainly, unperturbed by grace.

He was bold enough to ask for patience with the promise he would pay back.

He was dealing on the basis of justice.

What he received was not justice. It was mercy, but he didn't get it.

We need to get it before it's too late and we turn this world into a cauldron of revenge.

If God dealt with us strictly in terms of justice, there would be no hope.

God's mercy should awaken in us a similar mercy in our dealings with one another.

There is no way to claim that we are reconciled to God
and then refuse to be reconciled to anyone else.

There is no way to claim to be the body of Christ
and then tolerate those who foster hatred and division.

There was a great uproar months ago
about refusing communion to people because of how they voted.

It seems to me that living with revenge in one's angry heart
and with-holding forgiveness is a much more serious reason to consider whether or not one should
receive the Bread of Life given at the cost of forgiveness from a cross.

Forgiveness is not a choice we have
or something we measure out from the moral high ground
to those who meet our standards or show suitable sorrow.

Forgiveness is essential for life.

Without it there is nothing but death and darkness, revenge and retribution

It is essential because having been forgiven, we have no other option.

Audio Available

197

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

9/18/2005

Isaiah 55:6-9 + Philippians 1:20-24 + Matthew 20: 1-16

Fr. Boyer

There are a lot of things going on in this parable that is only found in Matthew's Gospel; many more than a few moments this weekend would allow. I had the luxury of spending a week with it before standing here.

There are a couple of interesting elements I would propose for you.

Perhaps during this week, you might sit with them and listen to the Word.

I found it significant that God is calling people again and again from the market place to the vineyard. Think about that for awhile.

Calling people to work in the vineyard is a constant in the life of Jesus.

Calling them out of the marketplace and into the labor of the vineyard is such a wonderful thought as our faith continues to challenge the materialism of the market place with the duty of work in the vineyard.

What are we doing in the Mall time after time when we could be here or at helping at Birth Choice or at the Food Pantry, or helping our neighbor or those waiting for our precious time in nursing homes?

No matter when you get to the vineyard, late or early, there will be a reward.

Then I sat for a day realizing that the kingdom of God isn't really about things; it's about people. And it isn't about who gets the most and who gets the least; it's about how you treat the people you live and work with; it's about how you receive the stranger in your midst; it's about how you accept amazing grace and what you do with all that you have been given.

One of the days while driving up the freeway to a meeting in Oklahoma City, I began to remember how often this same story is told in the New Testament. realizing that the repetition must mean it's important.

There's the story of Jonah who sat and pouted on a hill outside Nineveh when the people repented and God forgave them rather than destroy them.

Then there is that elder brother who resented his doting and foolish father for celebrating the return of the reckless, wasteful wild brother,

along with the story of that Pharisee who boated gratefully to God that he was not like the "rest of men" or the sinful publican

along with all the others who feel as though God owes them something for their right behavior. What kind of thinking is that?

The next day there was that big fuss raised over how people were using those FEMA credit cards and what they were buying! I read this Gospel again in the light of how others felt; those who work day in and day out for just barely enough to get by, contributing to a system that works this way. I went to bed pondering how radical grace is, and how offensive it is to those who slip into thinking there's not enough to go around.

From there, I got up the next morning and read it again, and sat thinking for a bit about the truth. We are all 11th hour workers whose debts have been paid and whose freedom and forgiveness have been secured through the saving sacrifice of a loving Brother and Lord. I spent the day deeply grateful that

God is generous to us and I forgot about grumbling against the grace shown to others.

Perhaps that's where we ought to be this weekend. What will determine this parable's potential to offend or to comfort will depend upon which of the laborers we choose to identify with. Many of us may feel disgruntled as the parable is read, perturbed that the daylong laborers, like us, there for the long haul, present in the pew week after week, generously supporting this church, always ready to do more get the same as those who come late to faith, late to church, late in fulfilling their duty, and always late in sharing the burden.

Perhaps we ought to simply count ourselves fortunate to be among God's forgiven and grateful for the mercies of God that go beyond justice giving us cause for Joy.

This parable is not about justice but about generosity;
not about money but salvation;
not about comparison with others
but individual relationship with God.

A key to the parable's secret is the owner's question:

"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with my own money?"

If the workers had known Catholic Social Justice Teaching,
they would have replied:

"No, No matter how hard you worked for you money,
it is not only a personal benefit but a community trust, so it must be spent responsibly.
No one ever gains anything without the help of others.
The world's bounty belongs to everyone.

A challenge to envy, this parable speaks to a human trait we see too often in ourselves.
We never complain about benefits to ourselves or even to others
as long as we end up getting the most.

In caution, this parable warns of envy in all its forms,
because envy is a denial of God's generosity.

We can never see that generosity with a jealous eye.

Perhaps what God really did in this story was give to each one
exactly what they needed, not what they deserved.

It's the best definition of Mercy, and the best way to recognize the hand of a forgiving God.

Audio Available

198
26th Sunday of Ordinary Time
9/25/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

Isaiah 5:1-7 + Philippians 4:6-9 + Matthew 21:33-43

Fr. Boyer

There is no sitting back and pointing the finger of blame and shame allowed here.

This Gospel is not about "them."

If this is the living Word of God,

then it is as fresh today as it was on the lips of Jesus.

He has just entered Jerusalem in triumph,

entered the temple and "purified" it.

The blind and the lame come to him, and children are singing his praises.

The comfortable, the secure, the people who have it made

and want the status quo to be secure are enraged.

Then, he tells a story of man with two sons which you heard last week

followed by the one we hear today just in case they don't get the point.

Finally, as if this were not spoken plainly enough,

wait till you hear next week's parable!

It always interests me to notice the location,

the place where things are said and done in the Gospels.

I believe that an evangelist who goes to the trouble to indicate a place

does so because it is part of the message.

This story and those before and after it are told within Jerusalem.

Jesus has gone to the heart and center of these people's lives.

Now it is being spoken again, in this church.

We are brought face to face with a challenge

to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,

and we are facing it in here, together, around the Table of the Lord,

just a week before another parable about guests at a wedding feast!

We can't afford to miss the point.

Everything we are, and everything we have is at stake here.

There is a sense of urgency here.

We do not have the luxury of gloating over the plight of the original tenants.

Two weeks ago we heard a call to get out of the market place and into the vineyard.

Those of us who have made the effort and the journey from one place to the other

now realize that we have something to do here,

and the owner of the vineyard expects a portion of the harvest we produce.

The trouble is too many think this vineyard is theirs,

that they've earned it, and have forgotten that God might expect a little more

from us than the latest model car, and the biggest flat screen tv or I-pod.

The young people who sit here might also pay attention to this parable

and consider what it is they are dreaming of and working for in school:

a higher paying job so they can have more stuff,

more pleasure, and more friends, more power?

If that's all life is about, we could learn a lesson from a Hurricane.

All that stuff can be gone with the wind and the rain.
Only those who have found something else in this vineyard survive such loss.

The question is: are we a people who produce the fruits of the kingdom?
Good fruit as illustrated throughout the Gospel consists of
radical obedience to God;
sincere repentance that leads to changes in heart, in words, and in works.
Good fruit comes from a willingness to be salt, light, and servant;
to be an untiring champion of the poor, the marginalized,
like Jesus in the Temple who paid no attention to those secure in their power
while the blind and the lame crowded around and got the blessing of his attention.
They had nothing to give him, but acknowledgement of his identity
from an awareness of who was in their midst.

He is still in our midst,
and we still have time to get it right – at least we have this hour
and if God will be patient we will have another.
If we understand Paul correctly today,
this is not call to begin to worry and be anxious.
It is an invitation to live true and honorably;
justly and purely, graciously and in peace.

The other day I was watching the children on the play-ground at school.
They have no worries and they anxious about nothing.
We have not taught them that yet.
They trust and believe that someone loves them,
that someone will come for them at the end of the day,
that there will be supper, clean clothes, and that they will be safe.
Perhaps this is what he meant when Jesus suggested
that we become like little children.

For those who are faithful in the vineyard,
for those whose lives here produce something for the Kingdom of God,
the prophet will sing again, and the choicest vines we have been given on this fertile hillside will produce
not sour wild grapes,
but the finest wine, saved till last for the wedding feast to come.

Audio Available

200

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

10/9/2005

Isaiah 25: 6-10 + Philippians 4: 12-14, 19, 20 + Matthew 22: 1-14

Fr. Boyer

A guest called "friend" is discovered to have come to share the banquet without being properly dressed. This unique element of our parable today is found only in Matthew, and it sums up a series of story/instructions about fruitfulness in the vineyard and the responsibility of those called or given an opportunity to bring in a harvest for the owner.

So this detail is about far more than a fashion faux pas, and Matthew makes it obvious from the beginning that the parable is directed toward us: the people who are here for the banquet, the church going, rule keeping folks who make the effort to be here and keep the commitment to stay.

Picking up this parable without hearing what has gone before in chapter 21, might leave us to wonder what norm had been breached. We might even think it unfair and wrong to pick on someone who came when invited and then was thrown out because they didn't look right. That thinking raises an important issue that is part of this parable's message.

Those invited to the feast are held accountable to God's standards for entry.

Those standards were put before us all through Matthew's Gospel:

doing God's will,

being righteous with a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees,
and producing the good fruits of the Kingdom.

These are considered the only adequate response to God's gracious invitation;
these assure the believer a place at the table.

It will not simply be a matter of just showing up. It is a matter of preparation.

Week after week, we "rehearse" the scene of this Gospel, the final banquet, the complete "wedding", the final union of God with His people.

It is, in a sense, a "dress rehearsal."

For us, it is not a matter of who is here and who is missing.

For us it IS a matter of what we are going to wear, or how we shall appear. Some of us have worked all our lives at this business of discipleship; some have just come to the vineyard. This is not the issue, but it is a matter of the standards and how we shall be accountable to God's expectations.

This parable might raise a question about our casual attitude at this "rehearsal" Coming late for a dinner party would be thought rude and thoughtless prompting apologies and probably limiting future invitations. Jumping up and leaving early would only make it worse. But this parable is not about Sunday Mass. It is about the coming Kingdom of God. Yet attitudes and behavior displayed here certainly reveal our readiness for what is to come.

We are nearing the end of Matthew's Gospel. There are only six more weeks. Since Advent a year ago, we have listened and explored the poetic images that describe what is to come, and we have studied what it takes to get there.

In the few weeks that remain, we shall be reminded that "reserved seating" should not be assumed.

Taking for granted the gracious goodness of God and failing to recognize the invitations of God, in whatever manner and through whomever these may be extended is serious business that ought not be taken lightly nor casually.

We have all but lost the powerful symbol of food. Fast food, frozen food, eating in our cars, and eating alone have cost us the ability to grasp the metaphor set before us. Breaking bread with another has always been considered a sign of friendship and intimacy. This is particularly true when we eat from a common plate. It is a bond of friendship and intimacy. About the only remaining symbol of this is the experience of drinking from the same cup. It says something about how close we are. When we see people doing it we recognize their trust and love. When we feel uncomfortable about it anywhere in public or in our homes, we are beginning to get the point.

Eating and drinking together is a matter of trust. It is a moment when we lower our guard. Eating together confirms reconciliation of enemies, if only for the duration of the meal. This is what we have been invited to, intimacy with God through intimacy and reconciliation with one another. This is God's will for us, that we would be one, that we would live in peace, that we would make forgiveness and reconciliation a daily event, and that we serve each other to make certain that no one was left outside and hungry in a creation of such bounty. To live this way is to wear a garment fit for the banquet.

Audio Available

201
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
10/16/2005

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

202
30th Sunday of Ordinary Time
10/23/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

203

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

10/30/2005

Malachi 1:14-2:1, 8-10 + 1 Thessalonians 2: 7-9, 13 + Matthew 23: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

It is easy to get caught up in this harsh critique of the Pharisees.

In fact, it is so harsh that the compliment they receive is hardly noticeable.

Their teaching is good.

It is their behavior that provokes the condemnation,
and the words of caution for disciples.

In fact the focus here in Matthew is not the Pharisees at all.

This is really an instruction for disciples.

The critique of the Pharisees is merely an introduction.

The lesson Jesus is giving disciples is that

they are not to be heartless taskmasters

demanding more than they are willing to give;

show-off do gooders making a big deal out of ordinary kindness;

or expecting exceptional service or recognition in public places.

This behavior is inconsistent with the internal spirit of humble disciples.

The disciple of Jesus will have an integrated life.

The outside and the inside will be in agreement.

This is the issue Jesus has again and again with Pharisees.

What you see is never what you get with them.

They have not internalized their teaching,

and what they do is not motivated by what they profess

nearly as much as it is motivated by a desire to "look good"

and so, of course, maintain their position,

the respect they enjoy,

and all the privileges that go with it.

Disciples of Jesus will live with integrity in the most strict sense of the word.

What they do will be an honest expression of what they believe

or they will not do it.

What they say will be a verbal expression of what they do.

Disciples of Jesus will be obedient only to God as they are obedient to their Fathers.

Disciples of Jesus will look to Jesus as their teacher for what matters, no one else.

It trivializes this lesson to think it is simply about titles.

This is about Leadership and Authority!

Consequently, we lead by example not by command.

Our leadership, when guided by compassion, will be recognized as genuine

because it inspires, brings life, and is enlightened by a vision of the Kingdom of God,

that is found in serving rather than being served.

The image Jesus has put before us

is that of a master who puts on an apron and serves the household staff.

This vision of leadership pertains to every one of us.
It is not a plan for a critique on the hierarchy.
It pertains to every disciple who leads and serves others
as parent, spouse, friend, neighbor, model, mentor, or confidant.
Husbands and Wives are being instructed
about how to treat each other and serve another before one's self..
Parents are being instructed
about how to lead and teach children with true authority.
Young People who already have positions of leadership
and those who are learning the skills and attitudes of leadership
must see and learn from Jesus the importance of including everyone,
the profound importance of appreciating and affirming not condemning,
and of strengthening another not destroying.

This weekend and tomorrow a lot of people
will be putting on masks and costumes.
This Gospel raises questions
about people who wear masks all the time.
Hiding or disguising the real face of things inside.
It raises questions to people who look in the mirror
and never see what others see.
The Word of God this weekend
demands with great insistence
that mask, mirrors, and the real face of people all three unite.

Audio Available

204

All Saints

11/1/2005

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14 + 1 John 3:13 + Matthew 5: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

The longer I live, the more I am beginning to realize that this day is not about dead saints. Hardly a week goes by that I do not recognize that my life is filled with truly holy people who have taken this Gospel seriously and embraced its spirit as a blue-print for a holy life. It is not exactly that they set out to become saints, got up every morning and said to themselves, "I think I'll be a saint." On the contrary, I suspect it was the farthest thing from their mind. I think they got up this morning and said: "Another day" if they said anything at all! What they did and what they do is simply live each day of their lives facing disappointment, discouragement, tragedy, pain, or great sorrow without becoming bitter or withdrawing from life and love. In short, they lived much as Jesus did, not doing anything great or memorable, just meeting what comes along with the gifts at hand, and never withdrawing from suffering, misunderstanding, conflict, betrayal, abuse, and suffering. In short, saints are people who have experienced the life, death, and resurrection of Christ themselves. They have come through it in victory.

They have not hidden from the needs of others. They have not refused anyone their time or their attention. They have not pushed for the "best seat in the house" or the first place in line. They have waited. They have watched. They have won even when in the eyes of this world they may have looked like losers or the least.

They are simply the people who work at Walmart to support their children.

They are the people who care for aging parents while raising their own children.

They are the people who bus tables without tips, who take in our dry cleaning, stand at the counter in 7-11 Stores while we are impatient in line.

They teach our children, clean our church, and pick up our garbage.

The point is, no one recognizes them – they do not look like the saints on our cards and in our books. There is no specific day in the honor, no one is named after, and there are no memorial buildings, hospitals, or schools.

There is just one day in the year when the church says:

Stop. Look around. There are holy people everywhere who are faithful, loving, and kind; who serve, who suffer, and who rise again just "because."

It is All Saints. Let them be honored, respected, revered, and treasured.

Audio Available

205

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

11/6/2005

Wisdom 6: 12-16 + 1 Thessalonians 4 13-18 + Matthew 25: 1-13

Fr Boyer

We have three Sundays to go with Matthew, and from the 25th chapter there are three important and unique stories bringing this year to a close. Each of them will focus upon the presence of and the coming of the Kingdom of God. The story today is found only in Matthew, and some of us think it is one of his best. The three levels of development are here:

the historical level of Jesus providing a parable about the Kingdom of God,

the Matthew level of the early church providing a parable about how to survive the long wait for Christ's return,

and finally, our use of the parable at another entirely different age.

At the Jesus level, it's about acceptance or refusal

with a warning that some will be refused entry.

At the Matthew level, it's about being prepared or readiness

for the coming of Christ in glory.

At our level, because we can see the other two, it is about even more.

Hidden because of all the visual imagery of this parable

is a sentence that should not escape our attention: "I do not know you."

It comes with devastating consequences.

Scholars tell us that it is an ancient rabbinical saying that Jews would have recognized immediately for its expression of separation.

It was the ritual word for throwing someone out of synagogue.

This bridegroom does not know who they are!

They have missed becoming part of the celebrating community.

The problem is not that they fell asleep, because both groups slept.

The problem is that one group was not recognizable.

This is the consequence of darkness: no oil = no light = no recognition.

Those will enter who are known by the bridegroom.

Those will enter who are recognizable.

It is about relationship, being known.

Too many people know a lot about Jesus, but they have no relationship with Christ.

Studying the Bible, and knowing its verses without knowing and living with and in the one it reveals is not the way to enter the celebration.

We all know this, but we have not all done something about it.

In the end, this is about procrastination which is the enabler of all our sins.

We love our habits more than we love Christ.

We protect ourselves with pious prayers that comfort us in a life of holy compromise instead of embracing a message of reform, conversion, and radical change.

Doing the things we have to do when they ought to be done whether we like it or not is a most valuable lesson in the discipline of a holy life.

It simply means that those who get into the banquet will live prepared for the door to open, not

tomorrow or the next day, but today, in this moment, now.

Our permissive society and a generation of children who never understand the meaning of the word: NO may not get it, but the truth and the heart of this parable is that there will be a sudden moment of meeting that arrives and then passes irretrievably.

Audio Available

206

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

11/13/2005

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31 + 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 + Matthew 25:14-30

Fr Boyer

With the second of three final parables

we move closer to Advent and the end of the Matthew year.

Last week and today, the parables speak to insiders; people who already have faith.

They warn against being too comfortable in that faith and too confident.

No one, even those with minimal gifts are excused from a responsibility for making the community prosper and grow.

Again, the three levels of this parable's development are important to grasp.

At the time and in the telling of this story by Jesus,

the third servant is the one everyone would have understood and admired.

He was prudent. He played it safe. He took no risks with what was not his own.

Making profit from some one else's money

was not approved behavior in the culture and at the time of Jesus.

Those who heard this parable from Jesus

would not have approved of the behavior of those first two servants.

So, when the ending comes, it is a surprise.

Those who heard it would have walked away shaking their heads.

But Matthew directs this parable to disciples,

to those who are believers waiting for the master to return.

Now the point shifts slightly, and the playing field, (so to speak) is more level.

The issue that they all receive gifts is more important.

The response of the returning master is sharper but less unexpected when we realize that the story is now being told from within the faithful waiting community.

Now it is our story to tell.

With different values and a different experience in the waiting,

it takes on new meaning since this is the Living Word of God.

We must realize that this "talent" spoken of is a monetary value.

In fact, in terms of their economy, it is about equal to a life time's income.

With that understanding, what is being suggested here is that God freely bestows on each of us gifts of more worth and consequence than we can begin to envision.

Contrasting the behavior of the three servants takes on a different look as well.

This is now about fear and a kind of caution that is not acceptable.

The third servant excuses his behavior and blames the master with his lame excuse which should have motivated him to do something.

But no, in his fearful caution and timid approach to his life, he does nothing.

In this, we discover the problem the parable now addresses.

Maintenance is not enough.

Continuation of the status quo is not only unacceptable,

it labels us useless and unworthy, and secures a place outside in the darkness.

There will be no acceptable blame or excuse for doing nothing.
That third servant did not trust his master. He feared him.

That wonderful invitation;
those thrilling words we long to hear: "Come and share your master's joy."
are spoken only to those who have trusted the master.
If the risks they took with the gifts they received went wrong,
it seems from this parable that it would have been alright with the master.
At least they would have done something.

Action, whether with few talents or many, is named good and faithful.
Action is rewarded by the presence of the master forever.
This parable is now a wake-up call to the church and to people of the church.
The status quo, maintenance of what is
for whatever reason is not in the master's plan.
Sometimes, the choice to do nothing is the biggest mistake of all.
This is Gospel wisdom, and it is Gospel behavior for disciples, believers,
and all those prepared for the master's return.

Audio Available

207
Christ the King
11/20/2005

Fr. McMillan

Audio Available

208
1st Sunday of Advent
11/27/2005

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

209

2nd Sunday of Advent

12/4/2005

Isaiah 40:1-11 2 Peter 3:8-15 Mark 1: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

As each of the four gospels opens,

we get a clue to the theme and the focus of that Gospel.

Matthew opens with a genealogy

that puts Abraham and David before us as a defining moment in history.

Luke opens with assurances of “the truth” to be found in Jesus.

John begins with a prologue

expressing the divine incarnation with the Word Made Flesh.

Mark, in his opening verses

speaks of Elijah, quotes Second Isaiah,

and describes John the Baptist in physical terms that leaves no doubt for those who recognize the characteristics that Elijah is back:

that prophet who would lead and announce the return to the promised land.

That journey back to the Promised Land – back to the garden – back to the perfect and peaceful relationship with God has begun.

Mark’s Gospel announces that this journey has begun,

and that God is leading the way

“Comfort” is the imperative that has broken the silence today.

This weekend, “Comfort” is the first Word God has spoken in this assembly.

It’s an offer for some that seems empty and foolish.

When you’re hungry or homeless, you can’t eat “comfort” or sleep in it.

Yet comfort seems like something we should offer to others,

and we are anxious to do so.

But these words are not spoken to someone else.

They are spoken here.

They are spoken to us,

and they are hard to appreciate in this community.

They are hard to appreciate when we are already comfortable in our lives.

It’s curious and worth wondering

about what happens when Comfort is proclaimed to the comfortable.

It is worth wondering

about what this means to a people who are not needing or hoping for comfort.

It could suggest that comfort is being sought and found in something else.

If so, there is danger here – and so the warning is raised.

“Straighten up and look ahead.”

Pope John XXIII once wrote brilliantly about the coming of God’s reign.

He claimed that when truth, charity, freedom and justice are lived,

the reign of God is at hand.

This journey we have been invited to begin is like every other journey we make.

We have to move on from where we are.

We have to choose what to take and what to leave behind.
Mark would have us see life in this world as that journey.
A journey that unsettles us,
a journey that cannot be made with crooked ways, twists and turns.
The comfortable may be reluctant to pack up and move on,
and if so, they will be left behind with no place to go.
If good Pope John is right,
we can only make this journey successfully if we walk in the way of Truth.
It is the truth about God's love,
the truth that because God has loved us all, we are all loveable.
It is also the truth about sin,
the truth that we are not captive and trapped in sinful ways,
but graced and loved and forgiven; and we ought to live that way.
If good Pope John is right,
we can only make this journey successfully if we walk in the way of charity.
This has nothing to do with good feelings, this kind of charity.
It is not about the nice, but about the nasty.
It is an embrace of the unlovely, the tiresome, and the bitter
with patience and kindness.
If good Pope John is right,
we can only make this journey successfully if we walk in the way of freedom.
Gospel freedom is always about choices,
and often about a choice between the easy way and the right way.
If good Pope John is right,
we can only make this journey successfully if we walk in the way of justice.
Peter speaks of it in the second reading today: it's about right relationships.
It is the fourth dimension of God's Kingdom: Justice.
It is found and it rests upon dignity and respect.
Poverty and helplessness are not found where God lives among His people.
No one rests, and no one is comfortable when there is anyone with no share in the generous gifts of
God's creation.
The Journey has already begun. We need to catch up and keep up.

Audio Available

210
Immaculate Conception
12/8/2005

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

211
3rd Sunday of Advent
12/11/2005

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

212

4th Sunday of Advent

12/18/2005

2 Samuel 7:1-5,8-11,16 + Romans 16:2-27 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr Boyer

He was just a boy actually.

The youngest with many siblings ahead of him.

There was not much chance he would amount to anything.

Being last in line, he did the job no one else wanted to do: tend the sheep.

When the prophet came looking for the next king,

the boy's father did not even think of him.

Only after parading all his sons in their finery boasting of their accomplishments, and having them dismissed by the prophet did the father think of him out in the field.

She was just a young girl.

She lived in Nazareth. People used to ask: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

She was a woman in a man's world.

She knew nothing of freedom or choice.

Her life was set at the moment of her birth.

She was told where to live and with whom, traded probably for some livestock, or maybe some lumber or furniture in a land at the edge of desert without trees.

Their ancestral home was Bethlehem – the least and most insignificant of places.

David and Mary stand before us on Advent's fourth Sunday this year.

They are very much the same:

unlikely candidates for anything great or significant.

Yet, these are exactly the kind of people God seems to choose.

Again and again, the biblical stories point to God's preference for the simple, the humble, and the powerless.

It is in the end, how God will ultimately and finally even reveal himself: simply, humbly, and as powerless as an infant.

Only those like David and Mary would find the message of the angel the least bit interesting or hopeful. "Nothing is impossible with God."

Those who believe they can do anything they want, who believe that if they can just make enough money or get the right job they can accomplish anything

would find the message of the angel naïve and silly.

"So what? they think.

"When I make enough money, nothing will be impossible for me either."

We are in the middle of a generation of children who think this way and believe it to be true.

We cannot hear the message of this gospel much less embrace its truth when we live in a "me first" culture.

David and Mary were not "first", and no one in their time would have considered them "winners" or

likely candidates for greatness.

Yet once they opened themselves to God, allowed the Providence of God to lead them, the testaments of scripture find no one greater.

David towers above all the figures of the Old Testament, and against him everyone else is measured. Even in the New Testament, his name is mentioned more times than any other Old Testament figure. Mary is the ultimate disciple, the perfect example of one who follows Christ and bears witness to the message of redemption and holiness.

As one of the most significant moments in biblical history unfolds in today's reading with the establishment of the covenant God makes with David, God also makes it clear that his preferred dwelling is not a temple, but a tent in the midst of people.

That covenant made in Second Samuel is fulfilled in Luke's first chapter, and the mystery of which Paul speaks in Romans today is precisely this: that God still prefers to dwell in the midst of people, not just by symbol and sign; but in flesh and blood.

"Nothing is impossible with God." is the Gospel we proclaim this season.

David knew it from the moment he stepped up to huge a Philistine with a sling shot.

Mary knew it, and so did old Elizabeth who is her companion today.

The two of them stand before us: the young one and the old one.

This angel's message is for everyone who may think they have been left behind, too young, too old, too poor, too dumb, too late in life, or too sinful.

It is not so, proclaims this Good News.

But we cannot think it's all about us, or ever indulge in the self-congratulating luxury of thinking we did anything at all on our own.

At the same time with a God who can accomplish all things, there will be no excuse for anything short of greatness, holiness, or goodness.

The only thing that fouls up the plan of God is fear,

and the first words out of the mouth of the messenger are: Fear Not.

Courage, that great virtue of a disciple is found not in the absence of fear, but in what we do in spite of it.

The glory of Christmas came about by the willingness of an ordinary person to obey God's claim on her life.

God does not favor people because of any quality within them.

It is God's nature to bestow God's favor on the sinful, the weak, and undeserving.

God grants favor to all who let the Gospel conceive new life in their hearts.

Audio Available

213

Vigil of Christmas

12/24/2005

6:00 PM

Isaiah 9:1-6 + Titus 2:11-14 + Luke 2:1-20

Fr Boyer

.....following the proclamation of the Gospel, the children between the first and third grades are called to the chair. This homily is spoken to the children standing around the presider's chair.

I want to make sure that you heard and that you know the Gospel story our deacon just proclaimed tonight, because there are some parts of it that are very important for you.

Listen again to this part of the story.

.....One of the older children who is prepared takes the gospel book and reads:

There were shepherds living in the fields near Bethlehem keeping watch over the flock during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were very much afraid. The angel said to them: "you have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you --- tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. this day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord. Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes."

So, in the first part of the Gospel story, the only ones who know who Jesus is and where to find him are the angels.

The angels are very important.

Without angels, no one would know one child from the next.

Without angels, no one would know that the child born of Mary was the Savior and Son of God.

Without angels, no one would know where to look.

Probably without angels, the shepherds would never have thought to look in the manger.

I think God made angels to tell us three very important things:

The first one is: God wants to be close to us. Very close. God wants to get as close as possible. So close that he can laugh and cry, and be hurt and comforted, grow and learn, be born and die, just like we do.

When you understand that message, then you will begin to wonder how you can be close to God.

The second message is about where to find God. Where do you look is what it's all about.

You have to look in unlikely places – in places where you would never expect to find God.

Not with the powerful full and the rich and famous, but with the weak and the powerless – with those who need protection, like a baby.

When you understand that message, then you will begin to take care of others who are helpless and left out of life.

The third message is about family. When God wanted to come to us and there was no room anywhere, there was room in a family. We all come from families, and every family looks a little different, but every family is a sacred and holy place.

When you understand that message, then you will begin to see your church as your family and the place where you family and your home learns about God, about forgiveness, about love, respect, and holiness.

Now these are the things that angels know about and these are the things that the angels came to tell us:

God wants to be close and we must find every way possible to be close to God.

God is found where ever there are people who need protection, and we must take care of others who are helpless.

God makes family holy and in our family we are safe with God, learn to pray and grow to be holy.

Now you know who Jesus is.

You know where to find him,

and you know the message, so in a sense, you are angels –

you have a message to tell and people to lead,

and I think God wants you to spread the news, show the way, and give glory to God.

Let's go bless the place in the chapel that reminds us of the message.

Here's the Gift of God to us, the sign of God's desire, found in an unlikely place, and born into a fragile and troubled family of love.

Process with a wrapped gift containing the image of the Christ child which the children will unwrap and place in the nativity scene.

Audio Available

214

Christmas

12/25/2005

Isaiah 9:1-6 + Titus 2:11-14 + Luke 2:1-20

Fr Boyer

This simple story, so familiar, yet always so fresh and so new is all about relationships.

The heart of this feast is not the divinity of Jesus.

It is not about angels, shepherds, inns, and wise men.

It is about God's radical longing for us.

Only those who have grieved the loss of their greatest love in life can understand.

This feast is about an end to God's grieving and longing for us.

It celebrates God's last, best, and final offer to heal what has been broken by sin,

to restore the intimacy of that first garden relationship

and close the breach between the divine and the human, heaven and earth.

In love with us with a love that we can barely dare to imagine,

God places himself in our hands and in the hands of a troubled world.

This is the heart of our wonder, the source of our Joy.

This birth is not just the birth of Christ that we celebrate, but our own birth as well.

Jesus was not born at the center of a holy world,

but in a tiny remote nation occupied by a vastly more powerful Roman Empire.

The population of that land lived under the threat of violence

not only from the Roman troops, but from Jewish zealots seeking liberation

willing to be terrorists to achieve it.

Our sense of the similarity of these facts with the condition of our world today makes the truth of this feast immediate.

Not a lot has changed.

There are still poor nations occupied by the powerful.

There is still violence inflicted by troops and there are still zealots here and everywhere who madly

resort to violence and terror to have their way and expel foreign troops

in order to establish a political/religious empire of their own.

In the midst of it all, God still longs for us.

We still celebrate Christmas and try to remember why

while arguing over how to greet one another respectfully

and be grateful for what we have rather than think about what we want.

The simple story we tell this day (night) is about relationships:

what we mean to God,

what Joseph and Mary mean to one another,

what Elizabeth means to Mary,

what the birth of John means to Zachary,

what we mean to one another.

Our God is a God of Relationship: Father, Son, and Spirit,

a God who not only loved this world into existence

but also “so loved the world” as to become one with and in it.

If we are made in the image of this God,
then we are a people of relationship
who must resist every day
anything that would isolate, separate, or exclude us from another.
We have, all of us, come from relationship and we are made for it.
Nothing must disrupt nor diminish the importance of our relationships to one another:
no ideology, no political system, no material stuff, no ambition, no job, no language
should cloud or dim the vision of the human family that is so tenderly set before us with the story of
Bethlehem.

This does not mean that we reject all things or refuse to grace our lives with beautiful
gifts or time-saving technology. These things can enhance the personal world and express our interior
lives while bringing us together.

However, it does mean that we must spend as much time and effort on our interior lives and
relationships as we do on the things we produce and consume so that these things do not take
possession of us.

And so, I give you a challenge today and propose a plan for the next seven days, the last seven days of
this year.

When we next gather and assemble in this holy place, we shall pass into another year of grace and life
before God.

Each night for the next seven, ponder the mystery, the joyful mysteries of your lives.

Speak to friends and family members of the gift they are in your life.

Let no one be taken for granted.

Then, when we next assemble in the name of the Lord,
we will have refused to let go of Christmas,
and what it means will have survived
the trash pick-up and next month’s credit card statement.

Because, it’s about relationships

and most of all about how God longs for us
waits for us,
and wants to feed us with His presence every day,
every week,
and every step of the way.

Audio Available

215

Mary Mother of God

1/1/2006

Numbers 6:22-27 + Galatians 4:4-7 + Luke 2:16-21

Fr. Boyer

....."they made known the message" and they returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them."

These words and this behavior described by Luke fail to capture our imaginations since CNN and FOX News have taken over the role announcing significant events. But at the time of Luke's writing, great and news-worthy events were announced in public places and concluded with words of praise for the monarch, or God, or the official issuing the news. The task was an honorable one performed by great orators or celebrated poets. We have a fragment of that history in our national tradition of having a celebrated poet read at an Inauguration. People my age may well remember the stirring image of Robert Frost standing on the steps of the Capital at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy. I was young then. Somehow I find myself not so sure the tradition has continued since then with such class; but perhaps my own memory or imagination has not been so powerfully stirred.

None the less, this is exactly what is going on here in Luke's second chapter. He wants to capture our imagination by having these shepherds assume the honorable role of being the first to announce important news concluding, as always, with acknowledgment and praise for the source of the news. The point of course, is that it is Shepherds. Our cultural equivalent might be maids, janitors, or garbage workers: in other words, someone doing work that no one else wants to do. Or even perhaps prison inmates, since shepherds were often people who lived outside the law trespassing and poaching off the grass and water of others. By specifying that these were the first to see, report, and then glorify God for the birth of Jesus, Luke was, in dramatic effect, declaring that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled: "The lowly shall have the good news proclaimed to them."

This detail and implications of it are a problem for us, because we are anything but lowly and shepherd-like. The consequence is that we are left to be spectators and remove ourselves from this divine activity, since this news has little to offer us. We have very little need, and no one ought to call us poor in this country or in this city. For shepherd-like people this news comes with comfort and brings hope. For us, it brings challenge and questions and an opportunity to look again at ourselves and recognize the poverty of our lives in the midst of our riches.

When we assemble here with each other week after week, we cannot afford to stand back and look nor be comfortable as spectators in the divine work of salvation and redemption. The Gospel we proclaim in this place is not for entertainment which is why we do not produce pageants. It is the stirring, powerful, effective Word of God.

It speaks to us in our poverty.

It speaks to us in our helplessness.

It speaks to us in our fear and our sadness.

It speaks to people who cover their interior poverty with pretence and power.

It speaks to people who hide the pain of their loneliness with drugs and excesses of every kind.

It speaks to people whose shame burdens them with anger and resentment.

It speaks to people whose lack of forgiveness fills them with revenge.

It speaks to people whose own self doubt and fear leaves them intolerant and impatient.

We are impoverished.

We lack the gift of peace because we have too little lived faith.

We would rather trust in guns, power and force.

We lack the gift of Joy because we have too little hope.

So we fill our days with trivial stuff that breaks and wears out in a season.

We lack the gift of Trust because we do not keep our promises,
and we quit in the face of sacrifice.

We lack the gift of Love

because we think it's about feeling good, looking good, and all about us.

Yet, once we see our poverty, the news from these shepherds is more than a nice story to tell at Christmas time.

It becomes an option for change, a hope for peace, a cause of Joy, a reason to trust, and the source of Love.

In her own poverty, helplessness, and fear, Mary heard many things said of her son and heard all of what he said. It never says she understood them.

It simply says she kept them in her heart and pondered them.

But by never dismissing them as impractical, impossible, or simply "theoretical", she remained full of grace, and in the end came to understand what she held and treasured and reflected on in her heart.

Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it. (Luke 11:28)

Audio Available

216

Epiphany of the Lord

1/8/2006

Isaiah 60:1-6 + Ephesians 3:20,3-6 + Matthew 2:1-12

Fr. Boyer

It struck me early this week that this Gospel story and the one we shall proclaim next week from John raise a question we have all asked in our lives more often than just once.

Next week, Jesus will turn toward some people who are following him.

He will look at them and ask the question:

“What are you looking for?”

It is a question Matthew raises too with these travelers who are so far from home.

What could they have been looking for?

What are any of us looking for?

I would suggest that getting to that question and its answer is what shapes most of our lives.

Those “wise men” of Matthew’s Gospel may have been wise about politics, astrology, and travel, but at the point in their lives when they made that journey, they were not very wise about the ways of God.

They went looking, looking for a king,

so naturally they went to the palace

in the capital city, Jerusalem.

If they were looking for power, they found it.

If they were looking for corruption, they found it.

Lies, deceit, betrayal, intrigue – all the stuff that goes with power: they found it all.

But perhaps once there,

they realized that this was not what they were looking for.

All that power, wealth, and influence did not really get them anywhere.

It certainly did not get them where they really needed to be with their gifts.

Herod did not need their gold, their incense, nor their myrrh.

So, they moved on to look elsewhere – to look in an unlikely place,

a nearly forgotten little place hardly the destination of anyone in the “fast lane.”

Had there been a tourist industry in those days,

I doubt that Bethlehem would have been thought of as the place to be seen.

I does not seem to have had much by way of accommodations at least!

But not until they realized that Jerusalem and all it stood for was not where they belonged, they journey, their quest would have continue.

What were they looking for?

They seem to have found it in Bethlehem,

because they left their gifts with someone helpless and want,

and they went home avoiding Jerusalem.

All of us looking for something in this life might ponder this story

a little more carefully with this thought.
What we are looking for and where look for it says a lot about us
and a lot about the purpose of our lives.
Where we look for peace;
where we look for love;
where we look for happiness,
even to the point of where we look for someone
with whom to spend the rest of our lives.
I just can't imagine how we will find peace at the Pentagon or a battle field.
I don't think we will find love in good looks, a good figure.
I don't think we will find happiness in the Mall.
nor someone to love and cherish us all our days in a bar.

What you are looking for, asks Jesus to those who follow him.
We can learn a lot about that from these wise men.

Audio Available

217
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
1/15/2006

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

218
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
1/22/2006

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

219

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1/29/2006

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20 + 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 + Mark 1:21-28

Fr. Boyer

There is grave risk here. There is already evidence of it.

An assembly that stands, sits, or kneels in silence while a few others lift their voices in song reveals the hold that this risk has in this place.

It is odd that spoken words are louder here than words sung.

These are not lullabies we sing to induce sleep.

These are victory songs of praise and shouts of thanksgiving.

It is strange that somehow many pull back in silence leaving a few to timidly pick up the prayer we sing.

This is the risk.

If there is an attitude that promotes watching, then it is going to be an issue with this gospel today as well.

Imagine the scene it presents, and wonder where you fit into it.

There are three positions with which to enter this Gospel:

as Jesus

as one possessed

or as a member of the crowd, the spectators, who just stood around in curiosity with little faith that would allow them to know who was in their midst.

The Church, God, and this whole world for that matter have little need for any spectators.

We were not called into life by a creator/God to stand around and look.

This life is not a game that finds us in the stands watching, cheering, and applauding winners and losers.

Those of us who have not hardened our hearts

must hear the voice of God in this sacred text spoken to us,

not as though we overheard it said to someone else at another time.

And so, the third option of standing in this story as part of the crowd is not an option.

Now this is the first miracle in the gospel of Mark, and it is not about power, it is about identity and relationship.

All authority comes from one's relationship with God, and that is what will unfold in the later verses of this Gospel,

the mystery of the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

The more Jesus asks, looks, sounds, and is identified with God, the more authority he has.

He has given us that authority, that relationship; and so it is possible to stand in this story in the place of Jesus

and consider just how it is we respond to evil, and what we do in the face of it.

Stand and watch?

Look the other way?

Call for someone to DO something?

I would propose to you this weekend that Mark is suggesting that people of faith who recognize who Jesus is and have entered into a relationship with him can do something about evil.

Yet, what about the other position in the story.....

If pressed, many of us could name our personal demons.

We are all possessed in some way.

Yet, it is easier to see ourselves as part of the crowd,
but again, I proposed that this is not an option.

If we can sit with this gospel and acknowledge our demons,
Jesus will say again: "Come out!"

"Come out, all those life destroying habits.

"Come out, all wishful thinking of "If I only had... or "I should have...."

"Come out, short temper and impatience.

"Come out, all you worries about the future or things you cannot change.

"Come out, the drive to keep up with those who seem to have more than me.

"Come out, everything that keeps me from being myself."

The man in this story has no name, because he is us.

He is one of many, nothing unusual.

Pay attention to how Jesus reacts – both for the sake of courage and for the sake of instruction on how to behave in the face of evil.

He is not shocked nor frightened nor appalled.

He does not turn away in disgust nor throw up his hands in resignation.

He does not judge the man nor condemn him, no name calling here.

To those of us willing to face our demons, this is hopeful.

Jesus faces the darkest side of any human being,
knowing that this is not the true self of that person,
and that the dark side need not control.

There is good news here for us, and a lesson on how to live with authority;
but it is wasted on spectators.

Audio Available

220

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/5/2006

Job 7:1-4,6-7 + 1 Corinthians 9:16-19,22-23 + Mark 1:29-39

Fr. Boyer

Look at the Jesus of this Gospel!

It's everywhere in Mark.

We will see it and sense through this whole year.

Go. Go. Go.

Work. Work. Work.

Rush here. Rush there.

Up early. Up late. Crowds everywhere. Traffic in the way. Can't get it all done.

This is the whole mood of Mark's Gospel.

Yet Jesus keeps going somehow,

and unless you pay attention to the details, you'd never figure out how.

As we move with Mark through this fast-paced account of the ministry and life of Jesus, we might fail to notice at first that the venue slips almost imperceptibly back and forth between private places and very public events.

Jesus withdraws now and then and goes to deserted places to pray.

The disciples don't get it at first.

They seek him out wanting more.

"Everyone is looking for you." they say.

But rather than give in, Jesus announces his agenda in the midst of showing them how to get it accomplished.

He will make the rounds of villages to do two things,

and keeping them both in balance was what he knew he must do:

It was not all just about healing and exorcism.

It was also about preaching the good news.

In fact, he knew that the healing and exorcisms had to remain in the context of the preaching, or he would have been turned into a side show celebrity.

I think he struggled between two powerful forces:

what he found appealing, fun, and got him attention and fame;

and what God was calling him to do.

Everyone of us is caught between those two forces.

Disciples of Jesus know from his example

that quiet moments in private places with prayerful reflection

is the only way to bear the burden of service, loneliness, and discouragement that are an inevitable part of belonging to Christ with grace and hope.

No Audio Available

221

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/12/2006

Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46 + 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 + Mark 1:40-45

Fr. Boyer

Understanding the law from Leviticus
and hearing it again this morning is important
for the understanding of this Gospel,
because the point of this Gospel does not come with words.

The leper was not just physically ill with a contagious disease.
This was not a simple quarantine act.
Lepers were considered unfit to be part of the pure and holy people of God.
The suffering of these people was not confined physical pain.
Their suffering was greater than that.
It was the pain of isolation, loneliness,
and the lived experience of being abandoned or cast away.

There are two sides to this story:
two movements or actions that speak to every one of us.
The movement of the one who was suffering
is just as significant
as the movement of Jesus.
That leper comes forward in faith!
He does not choose to sit back and feel sorry for himself.
He is not content to live cut off and alone.
He comes to Jesus even though he risks rejection again and even punishment.
We know this experience, all of us at some level of intensity.
Whether it is shame or guilt or embarrassment, too many never come forward.
They fail to hear the power of this story and be motivated by this man's courage and the consequence of
it.
The movement of Jesus too speaks to us all at another level.
He touches that man! He touches him while he is untouchable.
The issue is not simply that Jesus disregards the law. That has nothing really to do with it. He does not
wait till the man is clean, acceptable, or perfect.
He touches him while he is in his present state unclean.
Imagine, Jesus, God, affirms, accepts, embraces, TOUCHES, this imperfect, sinful, unclean, person who
dares to approach grace with enough faith to say: Help Me.
What he hears is not: "Come back later when you clean up."
"I'll touch you after you are healed." or "Say you're sorry, then I'll think about."
None of that stuff here. Just a simple touch because Jesus is moved with pity.
Do not miss the fact that it is not enough simply to feel badly for that man.
Feelings must yield to decisions and action, sympathy to authentic caring that does something. Moved
with compassion, Jesus touches that man uninterested in what anyone around him might have to say by
way of caution or by way of judgment.

The two of them take risks: one by reason of faith, the other by reason of love.

It is a stunning thought that leaves us to wonder about our own faith and love.
There is a deeper story of healing here that has little to do with Hanson's disease or anything like it.
It is the story of healed relationships that penetrates the isolation that keeps people apart.
When ever a person experiences recognition, acceptance, and value from another;
healing take place.

Our lives, our days for that matter are filled with the movements of this Gospel:
our need to ask for help and risk that even though we may not be perfect, may not be whole, or healed,
God, the Church, those who truly love us will not turn away nor abandon us. We celebrate that
movement sacramentally with Confession and personally by a life of prayerful conversion.

At the same time, the movement of Jesus must become our own as well.

We must reach out and touch each other in love and compassion.

The addict whose life is a ruin,

The person who lives fearful and hiding with positive HIV status,

The adulterer, the liar, the compulsive depressed, and handicapped, and more
all wait to be touched.

It makes no difference how they got that way, or what they did.

Jesus did not say to the man: "What did you do to get sick?"

He didn't think: "You probably had this coming."

That kind of thinking never enters the mind
of someone who loves and has compassion and pity.

All they think about is: "What can I do to help.?"

So it must be with us as we sit in this holy place in the presence of God today.

Ours is a God who does not turn away from any of us

no matter how bad things seem to be.

Our lives lived in Jesus

will never allow us to turn away from anyone God embraces and calls to life.

No matter what anyone else thinks, nor whatever the consequences.

Audio Available

222

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/19/2006

Isaiah 43: 18-25 + 2Corinthians 1:18-22 + Mark 2:1-12

Fr. Boyer

On Wednesday February 22 at noon there will be a meeting of religious leaders and a press conference at the State Capitol. I will be away from Oklahoma attending a different meeting of priests for the week; but I want to call this meeting to your attention in the hope that some of you can be there to represent this community along with the Archbishop and other Roman Catholics. At that meeting, the Archbishop will present a Declaration already signed by thousands of Catholic people from across the state. The Declaration will be a statement from faithful Catholic people that we believe violence against women to be clearly wrong and indeed sinful.

There is more to this effort than simply signing a piece of paper. It is a signal that we have awakened to some startling facts that cannot be denied; that we have embraced the Gospel as the revealed word and will of God for us; and that wish to live in a society without such violence where respect, love, and security for the most weak and vulnerable is the cause of everyone.

The Archbishop has written a pastoral letter which was published in the February 12 issues of the SOONER CATHOLIC. I urge to read it carefully. I want to quote from it for just a moment. "Violence against women is never an accident. It takes the form of physical, psychological or emotional abuse. This includes rape, date rape, sexual assault and other exploitation that reduces women into sex objects. Around the world, one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime. Within the United States, one out of every four American women will experience violence by an intimate partner sometime during her lifetime. One out of six will be raped.....To assert that violence against women is unacceptable is in harmony with our religious tradition and Sacred Scriptures.....The root cause of the problem lies in the ever-present inequality of and discrimination against women that exists in the world today. A basic refusal to see women as inherently equal with men, as mandated by our religious tradition, creates the environment for violence against women to flourish. As a Church and as a culture, we must take the elimination of violence against women seriously.....We cannot and we must not remain silent any longer (says the Archbishop) Accordingly, I call on all Catholics and people of faith to raise their voices, renouncing all forms of violence against women and, further to commit to teach their children to reject this violence in all its forms. To ignore the call mandated by our Church tradition and the Sacred Scriptures, or to assert otherwise diminishes God's love, care and compassion for some of the most vulnerable of our times."

As your pastor I want to add some facts that might motivate you to pay attention to the Archbishop's letter. Domestic Abuse reports in Oklahoma have increased 31% between 1994 and 2003. There were 23,773 domestic abuse reports in 2003. In this country, 4 million American women experience a serious assault by a partner during an average 12 month period. On average, three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day. 1 in 5 female high school students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. 1 in 3 teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, slapped, choked, or physically hurt by his or her dating partner. Parents cannot afford to think that this will not happen to their child.

The declaration as been placed in each pew. There are more in the narthex. Please pass them along the pew and add your name if you "condemn unequivocally all violence against women both inside and

outside of marriage.” Add your name if you “support legislation to eliminate domestic violence in all its forms”, and if you “believe that violence against women is a grievous sin with no biblical or theological justification, and you want it eliminated from our society.” You may do it now and leave it in the pew. It will be added to the names already presented to the Archbishop on Monday.

As you do this, sharing pens or pencils you may have with you or find around you, give some thought to the scene of today’s Gospel, and as I often suggest, there are different positions or role within it. It is not only about Jesus. It is also a story about those who stand around, criticize, and do nothing except scoff. There is someone helpless and vulnerable, but not without friends willing to help. There are people on the roof, tearing a whole and carrying the paralytic. And, there are those who go away giving glory to God. We would do well today to choose carefully what role we shall play in this on-going, life giving, sin-forgiving, healing word. For us in Oklahoma today individually it is time to let our faith get us up on the roof and do something for the helpless. For us Catholics, it is time to collectively continue the work of Jesus, who as risen Christ still looks into the eyes of those who long for help to see their need, and respond with the power of love regardless of what some may say about us or about what we do.

Audio Available

223

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2/26/2006

Hosea 2:16-17,21-22 + 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 + Mark 2:18-22

Fr. Boyer

This is about fasting, not about wine skins old and new;
and by using the image and the words "wedding feast",
the controversy heats up; because to the people of his time,
that image had direct reference to the messiah.

As we assemble here at the threshold of Lent, this is a great Gospel to proclaim.

Written by Mark in the earliest days of the church's struggle with Judaism,
it reflects what has happened as the Good News which Jesus proclaims
brings a rift, a tear in the fabric of old Israel
as the community of the resurrection struggles to identify itself as rooted in
yet now apart from Judaism.

That early church had to center on the new way of Jesus
now including tax collectors, sinners, the poor, the outcast, the sick,
and otherwise marginalized in the messiah's nuptial wedding banquet.

This inclusiveness pushed them away from the exclusive community encouraged by the Pharisees,
scribes and chief priests.

This inclusiveness remains a challenge for us today

both as a people who are still today excluded if we live clearly with Gospel values, and as a people who
sometimes to our shame do the excluding.

What prompted this controversial discussion was that already (it is only the second chapter of Mark's
Gospel) Jesus has

 disturbed a synagogue service by casting out an unclean spirit,
 been in touch with outcast lepers,
 and sin-filled paralytics, and then if all that wasn't bad enough,
 he has just come from dinner at a tax collector's!

The people in charge do not like this behavior.

It calls into question their own behavior,
and with it, their prestige and respect.

There is clearly something new here and it does not have much offer them.

The Good News proclaimed by Jesus is still new even though we know the stories
that convey it.

The consequences of the Good News are the same for us as they were
for the Scribes and Pharisees, the marginalized, the lame,
the lepers and those considered unclean.

Those people we consider unfit, unclean, lazy, and crazy
are headed to the front of the line when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

What must distinguish us from the Scribes and the Pharisees

is that we can recognize that God is nearer than we think.

Through the words and works of Jesus, we can learn

that the poorest, the weakest, lowliest are God's chosen ones.
We can also learn that God cares, that God sees,
that God hear and answers prayers.
From the Good News, we can also learn new things about our world:
that it is God's gift and we are its stewards and caretakers.
We can learn that we have no right to any of it,
and it isn't ours to consume and waste.
We can learn from Jesus what those Scribes and Pharisees just couldn't get:
that salvation is not a reward of the scrupulous observance of rules and laws,
but it is God's gift to sinners who receive that gift by faith.
Those unyieldingly rigid scribes, Pharisees and chief priests had it wrong.
Only humility and gratitude, service and sacrifice put us into the company of saints.
The forty days to come are our time to remember these things;
to get it right, to soften our hearts, to seek forgiveness and give it,
to remember that we are stewards and caretakers,
to consume less because we take too much of everything,
and waste nothing because it isn't ours to discard.

Most of us will be back here on Wednesday.
In fact, there will be more on Wednesday for Ashes than there are today:
an odd fact that raises a lot of questions among those of us who are here.
Even more strange is that last year 1,274 people were here on Ash Wednesday.
625 were here forty days later for Holy Thursday and even Less on Good Friday.
What's wrong with this picture, I have asked myself.
What's the point of starting Lent if you don't know how it ends?
Are burned palms more important than the Blessed Sacrament
and the Passion and Cross on Good Friday?
It might be worth thinking about that
before you get you get here on Wednesday and stay home during the Triduum.
It is time to begin the journey that will lead us to the wedding feast and the coming of the Bride Groom
– and so we shall fast until the feast begins on
Holy Thursday April 13.

Audio Available

224

Ash Wednesday

3/1/2006

Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Fr. Boyer

There are no ashes without fire.

What we shall use in a few moments to mark our foreheads comes from fire.

Ashes are a startling reminder that fires have lit our age:

Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Vietnam, Baghdad, and even New York.

The image of ash covered firemen in New York City
is set in our minds and memories.

We are citizens of a world aflame with hatred and violence
that rains down embers upon the innocent and the guilty alike.

Yet now and then we experience a miracle through these ashes.

New cities arise. People are restored by hope and by faith.

Repentance and forgiveness may fan embers of hatred
into flames that warm hearts and cast golden light upon the faces of those
who dare to gather around to brave darkness together.

We are a people of fire, the fire of the Spirit.

The tongues of fire that gave birth to this church leave a mark on our faces.

Year after year, we gather around a fire and carry its light into our assemblies

to proclaim the Risen Christ and fan into flame again the fire of faith, the fire of the spirit, the fire of
love.

Throughout this long winter, the land around us has burned.

The smell of smoke irritated our eyes.

The news of destruction saddened our evenings.

Even the fear of local fires disturbed our security,
and as the dry wind blew we looked anxiously for rain.

But I'm told in the pine forests after a fire,
something happens to pine cones that pop open in the heat
spilling seeds on the bare ground that quickly sprout
and in time bring new life.

We know how much more quickly our grass greens up
through blackened ash when rain comes in the spring.

This fire and the ash it leaves is not all bad.

With a little water life returns.

We are working here with powerful ancient symbols
that have everything to do with the Paschal Mystery
celebrating the victory of life over death.

We have and we will again stand around the Easter Fire.

We have once and often sprinkled and immersed ourselves and our children
in the living waters of baptism.

What's a little ash in between times
except a reminder that we are a people of fire,
a people of the Spirit,
a people of Pentecost
who know, believe, and live in such a way
that even though we are dust, we shall rise again
if the power of God's love
leads us to turn away from sin?

Even though we are dust, we shall rise again.

Audio Available

225

Lent 1

3/5/2006

Genesis 9:8-15, 1 Peter 3:180-22, Mark 1:12-15

Fr. Boyer

Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah

all stand before us in Lent's first four weeks,
because it's all about covenant.

Those of us who have marked ourselves with the sign of fire
as I spoke of on Wednesday are a people of covenant,
and these forty days all lead to the three holy days that establish, confirm,
and seal the covenant we have with God,
the covenant made with the blood of Christ in the Eucharist.
With the wisdom of the church's readings for the first four week of Lent,
we can clarify our sense of this relationship, renew its purpose,
and more profoundly realize our identity as God's chosen ones.

The covenant with Noah is very simple and primitive. It is the first.

It is a covenant with all humankind and all creation,
everything in the ark, not just Israel.

That will not come until next week with Abraham.

A flood, brings up memories and images of chaos,
the kind of chaos we can imagine at the time of creation.

In fact, as the flood ends, the story in verses prior to today's reading
reminds us of the third day of creation, when "the dry land appears."

In other words, the goodness of first creation is restored.

Creation is repeated.

Creation is restored.

Along with it, the goodness God proclaims over His creation.

In the simplicity of Mark's Gospel account today,

we get a glimpse of Paradise restored,

and with it a hint of what shall come of the life and ministry of Jesus.

He lives in harmony with the wild beasts.

It is like the beginning of creation before the sin

when in that garden, all creation was in harmony and peace.

This is the promise God first makes to this "Settler",

for that is what "Noah" means: "Settler".

He resettles the earth,

and then he give thanks.

After that, God makes a promise.

There is something of a Noah in us all.

We are all settlers on this earth, survivors of chaos and sin,

called in obedience (Build and Arc) to resettle this earth as God created it.

Forty days and nights for Noah;

forty days and nights for Jesus;
forty days and nights for us in Lent.
We too are a people possessed by the spirit,
“driven”, not “led” as Matthew calls it,
but “driven” in this life to radical dependence upon God.
In that desert, the mission of Jesus awakens in him.
His victory over Satan reverses Adam’s defeat,
and begins the process of restoring paradise.
In the desert of this season, a mission must awaken in us as well.
We are possessed by the Spirit too.
We have just marked ourselves with the sign of it:
ashes remaining from the fire of Pentecost!

A people of covenant are possessed by the Spirit,
not possessed by Satan, as Mark calls “evil.”
That Spirit empowers our deepest, best selves
to reach out in warmth, hospitality,
healing, hope and deep care for those around us.
Like Jesus, our lives in the embrace of God,
wrapped in a rainbow reminder,
lead us to bring God near to others.

When Noah finally realized what God was doing
all he could do was give thanks,
and at that moment God made a promise kept for all ages.
So it must be for us:
obedience, deliverance, gratitude, and a relationship with God in covenant;
spirit led, trust in God, living in harmony, sharing in mission.
In these forty days, the mission awakens in us,
the immediate presence of God changes everything,
and the Spirit drives us into this world on fire with love, armed with forgiveness,
and confident of our identity as God’s Chosen People.

Audio Available

226

Lent 2

3/12/2006

Genesis 22:1-18 + Romans 8:31-34 + Mark 9:2-10

Fr. Boyer

Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah

stand before us in Lent's first four weeks,
because it's all about covenant.

Last week the first covenant was our source of reflection;
a covenant made without conditions with all of creation,
a covenant of promise that sustains our hope for creation restored.
And now it is Abraham.
This time there are conditions to the covenant.

The story of a father willing to kill his son in a sacrifice
and the thought of a God who would do such a thing
is so shocking and troublesome that we risk missing the point.
It is not about a father nearly killing his son.
It is not about a cruel trick from God.
It is about obedience in the richest sense of the word.

The point is that Abraham has been thinking that his future lies in Isaac.
The culture of the time prizes the first-born above all else.
Abraham's very identity is there in Isaac,
and that is what he is really being asked to sacrifice:
his plans for the future, his way of doing things,
his expectations about how things are supposed to be.
What God is really asking is, "Will you do it my way?"
"Will you be obedient, to what I say even when you don't understand
or it seems as unthinkable as killing your own first son?"

The same request is made in the Gospel:
"This is my beloved Son, listen to him."
The voice does not say: "Hear" him, it says: "Listen".
It is an active response that is expected.
It is not just a matter of hearing him the way he just "heard" the gospel.
It is a matter of doing what he does and doing what he says, "obedience."

In our power centered world, we do not always get the point about obedience.
We confuse obedience with submission, and they are not the same thing,
especially when it comes to virtue.
"Obedience" for a disciple of the Lord, is a desire and willingness to look for the will of God in decisions,
to listen for the voice of God in what is asked of us.
Young people here, when you are obedient to your parents, you are practicing being obedient to God.
When you do what your parents or your teachers ask,
you getting ready for the day when you can begin to discover what God is asking of you with your life.
When Saint Paul suggests that spouses should be obedient to each other,

it is the same thing; an effort to see the goodness of God, the will of God, and the presence of God in the other.

Obedience is the condition for the covenant with Abraham.

It was the bond between the Father and the Son,
and so it shall be with us as well.

A willingness to set aside one's own way,
a readiness to abandon one's own expectations of how things ought to be
or how we want them to be,
and trust that the Lord will provide all that is necessary
is the way into Covenant with God.

Seeking what God asks, listening for God's will in the scriptures,
in the teaching of the church,
and in the depths of one's own conscience is the beginning of Obedience.

"Will you do it My way?" God still asks.

Will you make peace by forgiveness rather than violence?

Will you live by dying to your self?

Will you give away what you have to discover what I can give you?

Will you choose trust over certainty?

Will you believe what you cannot see or cannot prove?

Will you trust I know what is best for you?

Consider again, what Abraham did.

He did not understand at first,
but he was obedient, and after that came his understanding.

The disciples did not understand what was going on up on the mountain.

Yet, once they began to listen, once they entered into the life of Jesus,
the understanding came, and they moved into final and lasting covenant
For a people of covenant there is no other way.

Audio Available

227
Lent 3
3/19/2006

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

228

Lent 4

3/26/2006

2 Chronicles 36:22-23 + Ephesians 2:4-10 + John 3:14-21

Fr. Boyer

Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah are before this Lent because it's all about covenant.

Jeremiah comes next week.

Now the pattern is broken this weekend

in order to highlight an important moment

in Israel's historic covenantal journey with God.

From a covenant with all creation through Noah,

to a Covenant with Israel by Abraham,

we have moved from a covenant of love without conditions

to a covenant expressed in the law of Moses.

It's final expression in the Old Testament will be put before us next week,

just as we move toward the Passion of Christ.

This week, we reflect on what happens when the covenant is broken.

The first reading tells us of Israel's stumble in her journey with God.

This reading from 2 Chronicles narrates the

circumstances that led God to force Israel into

Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C.

Israel had broken the terms of the Mosaic covenant that

God established with her ancestors.

Israel was no longer a holy and separate nation.

All of Israel, the princes, the priests, and the people were

"practicing all the abominations of the nations."

Despite God's compassion and repeated attempts

to have his people change their idolatrous ways,

Israel refused to listen to God's call to conversion.

As Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians,

Israel had become "dead in our transgressions."

But "God, who is rich in mercy...brought us to

life with Christ.

The covenants that God established with Noah, Abraham and Moses

called Israel into a deeper and more committed relationship with God

so that Israel could have eternal life.

But sin cut the journey short and forced Israel to stumble.

Yet God's response to this infidelity and sin

was His Son, Jesus Christ.

"that the world might be saved through him."

The story of Israel's journey with God is our story.

We stumble again and again.

Like Nicodemus, we simply do not “get it.”
We toy around with taking the Word literally
while failing to see what God is doing and who is in our midst.
There is more here than a message.
There is presence.
There is more here than something for the brain and the intellect.
There is also something for the heart and for the soul.

As the Gospel episode today concludes,
we know nothing of how it goes with Nicodemus.
But he returns again much later to stand at the cross.
He stands before us today in this liturgy
to bring us along, to move us to understanding.
At first, it is all about listening to the Word.
and then it turns into action as he takes the lead to bury the crucified Jesus
and obviously comfort to the grieving disciples.

Rembrandt did an engraving of the gospel scene
of removing the body of Jesus from the cross.
In that scene, Nicodemus is of course, responsible,
having gone to Pilate to ask for the body.
He stands there in fine robes looking on.
Shafts of light come from the upper right part of the frame
onto the body of Christ reflecting brightly onto the face of Nicodemus.
The one who came at first in the night uncertain and full questions
now stands for all to see in the light of God’s presence.

This is the heart of our liturgy this weekend.
The mission of Jesus is not to condemn, but to save.
Like Nicodemus we find this hard to understand.
The harsh reality of life in this world would harden our hearts
with terrorism , torture, corporate downsizing, and ethnic cleansing.
It is an open invitation to be the judge,
but our faith in Jesus Christ calls us not to be the judge,
but to be the witness.

Audio Available

229
Lent 5
4/2/2006

Jeremiah 31:31-34 + Hebrews 5:7-9 + John 12:20-33

Fr. Boyer

Noah, Abraham, Moses, and finally Jeremiah
have lead us to the threshold of the week we call "Holy."
It is the week of Covenant.

The week of Promise.

It is the week that determines and tests our identity,
our true communion, and bears witness to the covenant we have with God
and the promise upon which it rests.

In the covenant with Noah the goodness of all creation is affirmed,
and the all embracing love of a Creator-God is expressed in a promise
fulfilled as the "dry land appeared."

The covenant with Abraham required a human response: obedience.

The covenant with Moses required obedience to the law.

The covenant Jeremiah promises is written on human hearts, not tablets of stone.

In its largest sweep, the covenant affirms that the God who created the cosmos
has made an abiding commitment of fidelity to a chosen people.

This commitment is grounded in nothing other than God's resolve
to be in the relationship.

This very desire of God; this initiative of God
makes us a holy people, the beloved people of God.

The prophet who speaks in our midst today is not some voice from the past.

Jeremiah stands in the midst of this assembly speaking to us

and raising a question about trust,

because trust is an essential element of any covenant.

The Israelites to whom he speaks having finally gotten to the Promised Land
had shifted their trust in the God who led them there
to their own political alliances.

Their story is all too familiar and embarrassingly like our own.

We Catholics have made it to the "promised land" of power, influence, and wealth, and we too have
shifted our trust to our own clever capacity and productivity.

Trust in God is not so much a way of life for us as it is an ideology.

It is a nice pious thought that has little to do with how we behave.

We pay our taxes, perhaps with some grumbling,
but a tithe to the church is for the Protestants.

If Father even mentions money once a year or less, "that's all he ever talks about." We priests know that
we can talk about sex, justice, gossip, or anger all day long, but don't talk about money. That's too
sacred, too personal, and too private.

We wouldn't think of missing work lest we lose our jobs,
but coming to church is a matter of convenience.

We get to work on time if our pay depends on it and we would be very cautious about leaving work
early, but we casually stroll in and out of here as though it made no difference whatsoever.

Covenant is what we are about. It is what define and identifies who we are.
It is the very structure and shape of our identity with God,
and it is the way through which God has chosen to relate to us.

In one week the church will celebrate, renew, and initiate people into the Covenant: the last and final,
full and complete Covenant of all human history.

The Gospel today speaks of planting with the metaphor of seeds.

Yet what John is expressing is the truth that God in Jesus Christ has planted himself among us. "Where I
am, my servants will be." says Jesus.

The consequence of these words is that we are to plant ourselves in the community of believers, and
that Christ is to be found in that assembly.

Membership in the church is not like joining the "Y".

You belong to the "Y" because you pay your membership fee and carry a card.

You don't ever have to show up.

You belong to the church because you plant yourself in the assembly

when it gathers. The relationship we have with God is expressed, lived, and celebrated in the
relationship we have with each other every weekend in this place around this table, sharing the broken
body and poured our blood of Christ.

But we've made it to the "promised land."

Like the Israelites who survived on the manna in the desert,
what happens here doesn't seem like enough.

But the mystery of our God and that God's hunger for us goes on.

The Covenant he would have with us is still an option, is still extended,
is still to be found and lived in Jesus Christ whose presence is the Eucharist.

Our witness to that presence is our own presence, nothing else will do.

The crucified Christ is not an abstraction,

but the ultimate revelation of how far love will go,

what measure of rejection and pain it will endure,

how much selfishness and betrayal it will withstand.

The unconditional love of God, fully expressed in Jesus being nailed to a cross does not flinch at our
perversity or turn way for our indifference and our sin.

This is the essence of the covenant established with us through Christ Jesus.

Absence from the profound mystery celebrated in the three days of Holy Week we have come to call
Triduum raises deep and profoundly serious question about our identity. Three hours of agony on a
cross freely given, and we find it hard to give three nights in church in his memory. People, listen to the
prophet.

Audio Available

230

Palm Sunday

4/9/2006

Mark 11:1-10 + Isaiah 50: 4-7 + Philippians 2: 6-11 + Mark 14:1 – 15:47

Fr. Boyer

Peter, James, and John: three great apostles

privileged to share in the great moments

and swell with pride and ambition, promise and pleasure are with us today. They climb the mountain in the company of Jesus and witness the transfigured Christ wanting to build tents and stay there in his company.

What promise there is in such a one!

They arrange for and joyfully share in the meal of Passover with a whole city clamoring to see their friend and their leader.

They broke bread with him and drank from the cup as a sign and promise of unity forever.

When they need him for anything, food, healing, instruction, shelter, company, respect; he is there for them.

And then he says to them:

“Keep watch with me.” ----- They sleep! When his company may bring danger or suffering, they can't be found. But this day and this Gospel are not about us as much as we may see ourselves in them. Even though this day and Gospel raises questions about us, we are finally given some answers about Jesus.

There are a lot of people in the Passion accounts, and each of those people might attract our attention.

But of all, Simon of Cyrene is worthy of the greatest attention.

Unable to bear the weight of the cross on his own,

Jesus needed help, the help of a stranger to complete the mission.

The hard, painful work of salvation

is a work in which God chooses to depend on human beings.

With all God's glory and power,

God still chooses human participation and help.

God needs us to proclaim and live the Good News.

Everytime we break out of our false need for self-sufficiency

and dare to ask for help, a new community emerges,

a fellowship of the helped and the helper,

the weak and the strong.

This is a true community of hope for a broken world.

The question for us is whether we can step out of the crowd

which seems so intent on taking care of itself first

and lift our share of the cross.

The question about Jesus gets answered in this Gospel.

Who is this?

What is he doing?

What is this suffering all about?

Not until the moment of his being “lifted up”

is he clearly and unmistakably the Son of God, Savior. If Jesus, in whom we believe and whom we have chosen to follow is fully himself only in suffering and death, then that is the very place where we shall find ourselves.

Think of those who have shown themselves faithful and proven their Christian identity in suffering. Ancient ones, martyrs who in their suffering and death bore witness to Christ. Think of John Paul II whose sufferings and illness made him an even more worthy and more credible as a messenger of the Gospel. Anyone who has suffered greatly knows the transforming power of that suffering. They discover as Jesus did their truest selves.

What is suffering for?

It is for discovery.

Why did Jesus suffer?

To discover and reveal who he is:

to reveal that God is found in suffering and present to those who suffer.

God's revelation in human history is not fulfilled in signs of power and divine greatness but in the humiliation of the divine being in Jesus' death on the cross.

It is the crucified Jesus who is the Son of God, not some wandering wonder-worker.

It is the crucified Jesus who is the Son of God, and not until then does the world in the words of a centurian recognize and affirm who this is. In that discovery anyone who bears pain and suffering also discovers Jesus, and in uniting ourselves to his suffering we shall become not just our truest self but a part of redemption, begun by Jesus continued in us until he comes again.

Audio Available

231

Holy Thursday

4/13/2006

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

Fr. Boyer

Was that conversation with Peter really about washing feet? I don't think so. I think it was about relationship, about intimacy. Peter wanted to make it about washing, at least at first. Then, slow to catch on as usual, he got it. His feet were not dirty. It was not about washing. It was about the two of them: their love, their relationship. The whole action was not about dirty feet. It was an invitation to intimacy.

That towel and that basin were not taken up by the usual servant who would never have looked at them, would have taken no time to see who it was, who was expected and would have been hired for the service as a typical sign of hospitality. This was the host. Something different is going on here.

In asking them to bear their feet to him he asks them to be vulnerable, like intimate friends. He asks them to let him kneel before him and touch them perhaps in a way they have never been touched before. The disciples are being invited into intimacy with the One who loved them so much he would lay down his life for them.

Brothers and Sisters, it is not only those apostles who are invited into this intimacy. "You also ought to wash one another's feet." He says to them. He would have us look at each other, notice each other, touch each other deeply, emotionally, spiritually, be bound up with each other perhaps in a way never known before. It is something new, and perhaps slightly uncomfortable. Like Peter, we might at first object, but now not because we miss the point; but now because we are afraid and sometimes want to keep our secrets, hide our shame, and avoid the needs of another.

None the less, the invitation still stands.

We are asked to become a people who love and care for each other. We are asked to become vulnerable to each other; to be willing to wash each other's feet, to risk pride, position, power, live, everything for each other.

But, he took a towel and a basin. Christ calls us to do the same. He calls us also to take bread and bless it and break it and eat it together. He calls us to take the cup of wine, give thanks for it and drink it. What is more intimate than drinking from the same cup? Yet, it is not only about bread and wine, just as the washing of the feet was not about washing up. It is about remembering who died for us, that we might live for him. It is about sharing in his life as he shares in our life, all of it, even the worse of it.

Again, it is about intimacy: coming to this table. It is about coming into intimacy with the God who has promised to be really present among us, blessing us, strengthening us, giving us life abundant and eternal.

No random gathering of strangers here.

When we share the holy food of this table,

we are invited into the intimate community of friends who love and care for each other:

no longer strangers, no longer servants, but friends.

It is the covenant of friendship and love.

It is the covenant of service and care.

How could we ever miss or skip the gift and the promise we are given here?

Come, let us adore.

Come, let us give thanks.

Come, let us rise to this new life.

Audio Available

232

Good Friday

4/14/2006

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 + Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9 + John 18:1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

Pilot is the man of the day in John's Passion.

He has the power.

He has the facts.

He has a moment in life to make a decision, and he does.

His decision is not simply about guilt or innocence.

He makes that one, as you notice.

He finds Jesus innocent;

then, goes on with his life.

We have no idea what his life was like after that decision.

He fades away.

Secular history does give us some clues that he fell out of favor, was removed from his distant and unimportant post in the Empire,

and then he's gone.

The decision he faced was not really about innocence or guilt. It was a decision between two Kingdoms, and the innocent man who stood before him offered him the choice.

He made the choice, and that was it.

Each of the four Gospels touches in its own way this issue of Kingdom. Only John makes the point that this Kingdom Jesus preached

is non-political. John has Jesus distinguish

between the Roman and the Jewish notions of kingship: one is profoundly political, the other deeply religious. Only those who belong to the "truth" can understand in what sense Jesus has a kingdom and is a king.

Pilot was not "of the truth."

In that sense, he become symbolic of this world. His choice is not simply his personal choice any longer.

It is a choice we shall make at some point in our lives.

With that thought, this day is not only about remembering the death of Jesus Christ,

it is a day that puts before us a choice

and calls into question the choices we make day in and day out. Perhaps we could call this day "TRUTH FRIDAY" instead of "GOOD FRIDAY"; observing that it is the day that distinguishes those who are of the truth from those who are not of the truth.

Standing before this cross, we must choose which Kingdom is ours. "You cannot serve two masters." He told us. If in faith we belong to the "Truth" we can then see in this defeat, this suffering, this death, the way to life, to peace, and to victory. But we cannot have it both ways. For those who belong to the truth, service out of love, forgiveness, and obedience to God's Will

is the only possible choice. When we make it,

the innocent will no longer be abandoned and left to suffer, power will give way to compassion, greed and the desire to consume, to look good, and be "successful" in the eyes of this earthly kingdom will give way to lives of commitment, gratitude, and love.

Then the veil will once again be torn in two,
but this time, not the veil of some earthly temple, but the veil that hides the presence of the Kingdom of
God, and finally, Pilot's choice will be undone, and the choice of Jesus will at last complete his work on
earth.

We adore you, O Christ, and we Bless You.
For by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world!
Audio Available

233

Easter Vigil

4/15/2006

Romans 6: 3-11 + Mark 16: 1-7

Fr. Boyer

Eight verses tell the whole story in Mark's typical style:

quick, to the point, embracing the whole spectrum of human emotion from despair to fear from hesitation to joy. It takes Mark only four words to embrace the whole divine activity from abandonment to the fulfillment of Covenant promise freeing from sin everyone from Adam till today.

Four short words, easy to miss because we know the story:

easy to miss because of the characters,

easy to miss because of the intense emotion and the drama,

easy to miss because they state a fact that is so obvious.

If we hear them this night with the dullness of twenty centuries, we shall miss the radical reversal of eternity they hold for us.

If we hear them with the complacency and filter them with the casual way we relate to the Holy in this post-Christian Western world, we shall miss the explosive experience these words had on those women. That angelic proclamation in all its simplicity is what has kept us so busy for the past 90 minutes, and kept us so focused these last forty days. Those words transformed the grief of those women, and changed the whole reality of creation.

HE IS NOT HERE!

"Of course not." we think. "We know that."

And so we trivialize the power of the resurrection.

But these words are not trivial.

They may not be dismissed because we know the story.

They are the story!

The story is not just that there was an empty tomb, that the one crucified cannot to be found among the dead, nor that somehow a great stone was rolled back.

These words will not be dismissed because heaven and earth were turned upside down by them, and nothing is the same ever again.

These words say as much about us as they do about an empty tomb.

They also say as much about God as every other word Mark has written before them.

It takes no degree in theology, no dogmatic apology, nor any kind of orthodox amplification to get the point. No stone was too big and no tomb too secure to hold or restrain the Messiah of God. Even the power of death cannot stop the purposes of God. Simply put, Christ who was crucified and was buried is not where the world expected him to stay. The message is simple and unmistakable: four words. HE IS NOT HERE.

With those words, we tell the whole story of what God has planned and is doing for us. It is nothing short of a new creation. Tonight we witness that new creation which like the first began in chaos and darkness. We shall see the water spring to life. Water that once threatened us is now water that will cleanse us. We have just proclaimed a new Adam who has risen by the breath of God's Spirit. But we are

not witnesses who stand to watch, we are witnesses who have been a part of it, for we are of this new creation. You who are soon to step into the waters of Baptism will rise into this new creation with hearts and lives made new by love; born again in Spirit and in Truth.

This is new creation. Should any come looking among the dead for those who have been born in this new creation, lived in it with faith, and died in it by baptism: the same will be said of them that was said of Christ: "They are not here." "They have risen."

Audio Available

234

Easter Sunday Morning

4/16/2006

Acts 10:34, 37-43 + 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 + John 20: 1-9

Fr. Boyer

We come here today by many paths, along different journeys.

We come for all sorts of reasons, in all states of questioning and in all the stages of faith. We are so like that group who gathered outside Jerusalem before an empty tomb.

Some are here like that beloved disciple, confident in what they have believed and lived all this time. They know that the One they follow, the One they call teacher and friend, will not let them down, whatever it looks like to the rest of the world. They come looking for any sign to encourage them to say, "Yes, this is true, faith is true. Rejoice."

Some are here like Peter, full of suspicion and perhaps some anger. Experience has told them that the world is not a trustworthy place. There is always someone to rob their joy, betray their hope, crucify their dreams, and bury their enthusiasm. They have learned not to hope, because hope disappoints them and leaves them with less than they had before. They know how powerful are the forces of destruction in the world that will hurt them and destroy them if they are not careful. So, they are suspicious. They need proof. Questions give way to more questions while they seek answers. Yet, for them the day will come when they will shout more publicly and convincingly than most that "Jesus Christ is Lord of all."

Some are here like Mary entombed in grief. This world, for them, is a place of sorrow and disappointment. Everything they care about dies. All their dreams collapse in ruin. They met the Lord of Life once, but then he left and they had to make their own way in the world, depend on their own decisions and face their demons by themselves. They come not expecting anything more than a chance to express their grief and share their pain. It takes the power of the risen Christ to break through their stone of sorrow and raise them up out of their tomb of despair to new life; and when they find that place of joy, their Alleluia rings out above all weeping.

Some are here just to watch, curious at the commotion, not sure what to expect or what they will find. Surly they were around the entrance of that tomb as well. People running around in the early hours of the morning must have attracted some attention. The Gospel writers are just not as interested in on-lookers as these events accelerate and the excitement increases. Curiosity is never as interesting as suspicion resolved to conviction, anger transformed to peace, sorrow to joy and disappointment to surprise.

We all come here by different paths along different journeys. But there is only one reason we come: because it is Easter, because one Sunday two thousand years ago some people went to the tomb of their friend and found it empty. Yet, the empty tomb is not the issue, nor is it really the foundation of our faith. It hardly matters how the body of Jesus came to be missing because in the last analysis, what convinced people that he had risen from the dead was not the absence of a corpse, but the living presence of the one who had died. And so it has been ever since.

Some years back, the tomb of King Tut was discovered, and people went in great numbers to look at something they could understand: the contents of the tomb. When the stone was rolled away, it was the

objects in it, not the man that rose again to life. In that tomb, the man had become the most lifeless of all the objects.

What a startling image of our own times this may prove to be.

We may become lifeless while our stuff lives on and on and on.

There is quite a contrast between King Tut and King Jesus!

King Tut left a lot of stuff to fill museums and entertain the curious.

King Jesus left people whose lives had changed for ever.

We are a people who often live with a “me first” mentality. Children are like that, but they quickly learn that there are some situations where you definitely would rather not be first. We call those the “you go ahead” situations. We like this arrangement when we don’t want to take the risk, look foolish, suffer pain, show fear, or experience the unknown. The good news of this Easter morning is that we have looked around at the sinfulness and shortcomings of our lives, looked at the inevitability and finality of death, and cautiously slipped up beside Jesus, poked him in the side and said: “You go ahead.” And we’re here because he did.

In fact, he is the one who said: “Me first.” and pushed himself to the front of the line; through Jerusalem, into that mess in the temple, and onto the Golgotha with his cross. He did go ahead, which is just where we need him to be. Since the beginning of creation, God has been ahead of us every step of the way. God is ahead of us in pain and suffering, torture and death. God is ahead of us at work, in relationships, in our losses and in our unknowns. The secret we have revealed today is that there is no place we can go, no dare we can take, no limb we can crawl out on, where we will not find that God has already gone ahead. Perhaps then, it is time to follow not as though we will not know the way and know the end. It is Life. It is Communion with God. It is Fellowship in Faith. It is the Kingdom of God, because Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will Come Again.

Audio Available

235

2nd Sunday of Easter

4/23/2006

Acts 4:32-25 + 1 John 5:1-6 + John 20:19-31

Fr. Boyer

This Gospel has been proclaimed on the Sunday after Easter for my whole life and beyond. All of us have heard it over and over again. It was the Gospel proclaimed at my first Mass in 1968. Consequently each time I hear it, I am filled with memories and gratitude. Each time I have preached and reflected on this text, I am drawn deeper and deeper into John's Gospel, and part of that is because each time I preach it, more and more people have departed from my life through death leaving me less interested in Thomas and the other Apostles, and more interested in the transformation of their relationship with Christ. That is really what this is all about: a transformation of relationship from being with someone to being in someone.

What is this manifestation of Jesus and how does he get in that room? A shallow reading of these texts would leave us with the impression that there is some kind of resuscitated corpse popping up now and then like something in a movie with all kinds of technical special effects.

John never intended to suggest that their eyes saw something.

This experience is not a "sighting"!

What happens here is that they were able to read the signs of his wounded and open body.

This was their recognition that through those wounds there is now access to the divine life which is being poured out for us.

They understood as we must that the opening of the side of Jesus recalled the birth of Eve from the side of Adam.

These wounds are channels that make life with God available.

Here is the truth of this death that leads to Joy.

God loves us enough to die for us.

For those faithful disciples who came together and stayed together, the coming of Christ was a regular event,

but Thomas was not there, and so he missed it and remained stuck at a physical level of faith wanting to probe wounds of the flesh.

His invitation is not to touch, but to go beyond the physical level and open himself up to a communion with divine life. John never tells that he touched something. What we understand is that his relationship to Jesus was transformed. As part of the community, he finally experiences the risen Lord.

This does not happen when he is absent.

There in communion with the others, he is invited into the wounds.

The breakthrough of this moment, the shift Thomas makes from the Jesus of his past to the Resurrected Christ whose presence is now within him is nothing short of being born again – being born in the Spirit.

The world which sees with physical eyes only what is physical can no longer see Jesus after his death.

But those whom he loves will see him because they have spiritual eyes but that cannot happen until He dies.

What all this eventually can awaken in us is the truth and realization that we are spiritual in nature, not just a physical presence on this earth which passes away. There is something about us that does and will last forever. The first stirrings of that truth call into question all of our pre occupation with our looks, with our earthly possessions, the values of our lives, what we do day in and day out, and why we do it. Then, it calls to question our mission, our purpose, and relationships. As physical beings, we know what it means to be with someone. As spiritual beings, we know what it means to be in someone as Jesus said more than once in John's Gospel (Jn 14:10; 15:4 & 17:21). "I am in the Father, you in me, and I in you."

Appreciating, living in, nurturing our spiritual selves and the spiritual communion we have with God and all creation is the breakthrough of faith which gives us our unique understanding of death This Easter Sunday is our day to celebrate the re-creation of life, but this time not the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but our own. There is a new form of presence. It is not waiting for us beyond the locked doors of death it is already in our midst.

Audio Available

236
3rd Sunday of Easter
4/30/2006

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

237

4th Sunday of Easter

5/7/2006

Acts 4:8-12 + 1 John 3:1-2 + John 10: 11-18

Fr. Boyer

I honestly believe that there is nothing more terrifying to a human being than even the suspicion let along the conviction, that he or she is alone, set adrift in a pointless world.

So the revelation of Christ as Shepherd is welcome and comforting.

Somehow that image above all others makes the promise

"I will be with you always" imaginable and possible.

We are in the hands of a God

who knows us better than we know ourselves,

who cares for us more graciously than we could ever care for ourselves.

This is the insight

that sparked the enthusiasm of the apostles in their earliest preaching.

The kind of enthusiasm we hear from Peter in the first reading.

John had just finished healing a cripple;

an act that got them arrested and demanded an explanation.

Peter's response is that there should be no surprise at that healing,

because healing, wholeness are a natural consequence

of faithful awareness of the presence of God.

What looks like healing is more than a mere cure.

The cure is an outward sign of a much deeper inner reality.

It is a sign of God's mercy that endures forever.

This saving power, this mercy, is nothing less than steadfast covenant love.

It is the kind of love that broke open the world

in the death and resurrection of Jesus and overflows as healing grace;

it is the kind of love that compels the shepherd to put himself at risk

for the sake of the sheep.

It is a love that recreates us as children of God.

This love has already taken hold of us.

Through baptism we are God's children now.

Easter celebrates this reality.

What we will eventually become has not yet reached fulfillment.

But we have had a hint of it this weekend in this church.

In the long and steady procession of family and friends and children

coming to this altar for First Communion,

more than once I had to pause, swallow slowly and look down

after tears of joy and love in the eyes of mothers and fathers

brought tears to my own eyes.

Love is all around us, and the love of which this Gospel speaks is manifest again and again in the love of every parent for their children for whom they would and do sometimes lay down their lives.

When salvation is brought to its fulfillment,

there will be a great illumination
and we will recognize the marvelous dignity that is ours.
We will see that we have been made like God,
and we can now act like God acts.
We can bring the saving grace of God to a world in desperate need of healing.
We can do this in our families, in this parish,
at work and countless other situations of our lives.

Our limited and sometimes impoverished language,
English does not always carry nor allow the richest sense of words
translated from other tongues.
It is unfortunate that at sometime in the past
someone chose to translate this Gospel using the word: "Good"
for a word in Hebrew that more accurately means, "Beautiful."
In our tongue, "Good" means too many other things like,
competent, tasty, or morally correct.
Not so in John's Gospel.
What he describes as the image of God's care for us made manifest in Jesus
is nothing short of noble and beautiful.
That is the real, literal meaning of the original text.

God's love for us is not "good" – it is nothing less than beautiful and as noble as the loving gaze of
parents on their children at their finest moment.
It is a beautiful God,
a beautiful shepherd with all the sense of intimacy that word will allow
that comes before us this week of Easter Joy.
If it does not transform us all into beautiful people who are the earthly reflection of that Beautiful
Shepherd,
then faith has failed us and we are fools to be here.

After communion.....

Throughout the world this day, communities assembled in worship like our own unite in prayer for
Vocations. You most graciously celebrated my ordination anniversary two weeks ago, and continue to
share the joy of my life day in and day out. I've always believed that a pastor's most joyful day is First
Holy Communion, and my own tears and thrill today is evidence again and reminder that I my life and
vocation is nothing less than a wonder, a miracle of love, and a gift beyond price. I teach our children at
very opportunity to look into the future with their gifts and ask always what God wants them to
become, who God wants them to be, and how to use the gifts most completely. You who wish happiness
for your children must know that "Happiness" comes first of all on and always from being who you were
made and called to be and nothing else. Pray for your children this way. Teach them to consider always
in every decision what God asks of them. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" is the question
we Catholic Disciples of Jesus ask, not "What do you want to do?" A life in consecration to God, to the
Gospel, to leadership in the community of faith, and to prophetic service is being asked of some in this
parish family. That call is a sign that God is very near and God's blessings are abundant. Parents, pray for
it in your homes.

I believe that one of the signs of God's nearness and presence in the church is the calling of great men
and women to heroic lives of witness and service. We in Oklahoma have been touched by the hand of

God in man from Okarche who was a beautiful and noble shepherd who did not run like a hired hand from his sheep.

On this day of prayer for Vocations, I want to call you to prayer about another Vocation, the calling to sanctity, holiness, and "sainthood." The process for acknowledging the courage, faith, and holiness of our own Father Stanley Rother has begun in earnest. The ushers are passing among you now cards in his memory with a prayer we can and ought to use until that day when all the church will proclaim what we believe: that he is among the saints living in God's presence.

When I say this prayer, I ask Stan to stir the hearts of our children to follow his example and step forward with their gifts to say to God : "Here I am, send me."

Never forget what goes unsaid in the Gospel of this day. It was a shepherd who came forward to reveal God's love and mercy, not a prince or a king. It is a shepherd God still chooses to continue God's work, not a CEO, a President, or some powerful celebrity with a short and shallow life drowning in fame and fortune. It is shepherds we still need: simple, faithful, good, beautiful, and willing.

Are they not among us?

From the back of card you have received, let us pray together:

Heaving Father, source of all holiness, in every generation; you raise up men and women heroic in love and service. You have blessed your Church with the life of Stanley Rother, priest, missionary, and martyr. Through his prayer his preaching, his presence and his pastoral love, you revealed your love and your presence with us as Shepherd. If it be your will, may he be proclaimed by the universal church as martyr and saint, living now in your presence and interceding for us all we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Audio Available

238
Confirmation 2006
5/8/2006
7:00 PM

Abp. Beltran

Audio Available

Acts 9:26-31 + 1 John 3:1-21 + John 15:1-8

Fr. Boyer

We must be careful about how we understand the descriptive adjective "true."

Like last week, this is another translation issue

that can easily distract and diminish what is revealed to us in today's Gospel.

If missing the literal meaning of a "Good" shepherd last week

cost us the beauty of what is revealed;

it is no less so this week with the word: "True."

As we use it in English, "true" suggests

that this vine is the real one rather than a false one.

To be satisfied with that understanding is shallow, simple,

and a long way from what the Jesus of John's Gospel is saying about himself.

"True" as it is used in the original context

and in the sense of this revelation is not the opposite of false.

It means far more than that.

"True" in this Gospel means something more like faithful or dependable,

somewhat like the way we would describe a friend who is "true."

It isn't that some people are "false" people.

It is more properly said that some are "true",

meaning that you can count on them to be there when you need them,

that when times are tough, they come through.

When Jesus announces that I am "The True Vine",

he speaks to us of relationship

not of falsehood, error, right or wrong.

He comes not to divide into true or false,

but to be friend, to be loyal, and be worthy of trust.

Vines in themselves are not good or bad.

The language of the bible about vines and even the language of horticulture speaks of the "choicest"

vine and "choicest" wine.

Just as the Shepherd may have other sheep,

there may be other vines,

but for those who branch off the fruitful vine,

there is only one that is most chosen;

and for those who have known the suffering and the sacrifice of pruning,

and remain connected to the vine, there will be a harvest of sweet and choice wine: the everlasting sign of the bounty of God's Kingdom.

Since Easter's first day, we have marveled

at the resurrection and the presence of the risen one.

Last week, this week, and the week to come,

we shall continue to ponder our relationship with this risen one

and the relationship to which we have been called in Him.

Leading us soon to make real the Baptism we have received

not in Water, but in the Spirit on Pentecost.

It is a Birth that makes us good or beautiful, in the image of last week,
a birth that makes us true or authentic extensions of Christ in the world
thriving on Christ's resurrected life, surging through all his members.

As branches of this vine, as members of his body,
as anointed people in this church, we live in Christ as Christ lives in us.

Audio Available

240

6th Sunday of Easter

5/21/2006

Acts 10 25,26,34,35,44-48 + 1 John 4:7-10 + John 15:9-17

Fr. Boyer

There is in our understanding of this Gospel,
a powerful description of discipleship.

The disciples of Jesus are his friends.

They have been chosen by him.

The usual Jewish custom was for disciples
to seek and choose their teachers.

Not so in the relationship with this teacher, Jesus.

He does the seeking and calls.

He sets the tone and the style of the relationship,
and he does it as much by deed as by word
when he crawls on the floor and washes their feet.

The commandment he gives,
the mission he proposes for his disciples
in not simply to love one another.

There is a second part to that verse: "As I love you."

With those words we are far removed from the emotions of affection
and the sentiments of greeting card verses, Hollywood,
and the torrid affairs of celebrities paraded before us day and night
on the magazine covers at the checkout stand.

That caricature of love has nothing to do with the divine,
and it reveals nothing to us about what has happened to us by redemption.

Again for the third week,
our language fails to give clarity about what is being said here.

"Remain in my love" is far too weak for the sense of the original language.

It means STAY HERE IN PLACE – STICK TO THIS – NEVER WAVER!

Remember, this text is a commentary on last week's verses
about branches being attached to the vine.

"Remain" is too passive.

The disciple is not just standing around in one spot.

The disciple is fixed in place,

fixed in this relationship,

and the strength of that relationship produces fruit.

The wonder here is this relationship called "friendship."

There is mutuality in this suggestion. It means more than being "friendly."

True friends are equal sharing something intimate and unique.

Consequently, this suggestion that we be "friends" with Jesus

and furthermore be "friends" with God

should leave us stunned with wonder and almost recoil at the thought.

"Wait a minute." we might say.

Is he suggesting that the old slave and master thing is gone?
That is what it says, isn't it?

Sheep of this flock, branches of this vine,
people loved by God and people who live as Jesus loved
are lifted out of broken humanity and born again in Divine Life.
It is not enough to "imitate" Jesus Christ.
That would be role playing – acting like, not at all the real thing.

This Easter Season has proposed again and again;
that the risen one is within us,
that the risen one is seen within , heard within, and known within
a people who have gathered in his name and consumed his flesh and blood.
From then on, it's not an imitation.
It is the real thing.
It is the risen Lord.
We are the Body of Christ
who do what he does, and He does what we do.
Reason enough then to make certain
that what we do reveals what we have become.
Reason enough to make certain
that what we say reveals who we are.

This love is not something we give or take, receive or deserve.
It is God – a God who embraces all without condition or reservation.
It is God – a God who invites us in:
into life, into love, into friendship, into service, compassion, care,
and into eternity.

This is the commandment:
Live every waking moment with the knowledge that God is within you,
and see that presence in every other human life, and stay that way!

Audio Available

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Solemnity of the Ascension

5/28/2006

Acts 1: 1-11 + Ephesians 4:1-13 + Mark 16: 15-20

Fr. Boyer

Today when we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord,
we are face to face with the truth of Divine Revelation.
Nothing that Christ did or said was meant for him alone.
Christ did not speak to himself.
What is revealed in Christ is not for the sake of Christ.
It is for our sake.

In revealing to us what he is,
Christ also reveals what we are.
The ascension is a description of our own future,
of what lies in store for us.
The ascension is also a commentary on our present condition,
in light of the prayer Jesus has offered for us.

The focus of the New Testament Gospel insists that Jesus is not "gone"
in the sense of being over or finished,
because he is still in relation to those of us who are sort of --- "on the ground."
He has prayed that even though he will soon be gone,
the Father will continue to offer the same protection from the world and evil
that the Father provided for His Son;
because they belong to him,
because He now lives in them.
and because they have faith in Him,
His disciples are no longer "of the world."
They are just stuck in it – so to speak.
On the ground, yes; but oriented toward the things that are above.

So the revelation of this Gospel
is both about us and about Christ:
about Christ in as much as his redemptive, sanctifying work
leads him back to the Father;
about us in as much as we now know where we belong,
and how best we might relate to this world and the things that are above.
We have, like the risen ascended Lord,
been taken out of this world,
yet we too often fail to live like it,
and certainly do not often look like it.
Christ no longer needs to be with us, because now he is within us.
It is a quality of presence, this being within.
It is a presence that when recognized, acknowledged, and embraced
becomes evident in "Spirit" as we shall soon be reminded next Sunday.
But until that Spirit has filled us, overwhelmed us, and taken possession of us,
we shall be stuck in this world,

standing around all day.

Our prayer today is the prayer of the church longing and groaning in hope and expectation that we shall be born again, that we shall be re-created, that we shall be lifted up from the petty, simplistic, materialistic things of this world, and fix our eyes, our hearts, and our hopes on what is to come. For we who are Baptized into Christ and Confirmed in His Spirit are no longer of this world.

We live in joy with a firm expectation of what is to come, and we pray:

COME HOLY SPIRIT

FILL THE HEARTS OF YOUR FAITHFUL

AND INKINDLE IN US THE FIRE OF YOUR DIVINE LOVE.

Audio Available

242
Pentecost
6/4/2006

Fr. Goen

Audio Available

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Holy Trinity

6/11/2006

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40 + Romans 8:14-17 + Matthew 28:16-20

Fr. Boyer

This week and next we are led by the church's readings

to ponder the wonder of relationship and presence

with themes of the Trinity and the Body and Blood of Christ.

The easy way is to simply dismiss the wonder of this relationship

by declaring it a "mystery" and thereafter never give it another serious thought.

I suspect because of our leanings in that direction

the church simply keeps bringing it up year after year following Pentecost.

In my own progression of thought and understanding

I know this to be so.

But little by little, year after year, like water dripping on stone,

that easy dismissal is not so easy nor satisfying.

In my own progression I went from mystery to dogma

which was satisfying enough at the time, but never got the point.

Any student of Church History knows well

the progression and development of thought and language,

the trials and schisms, violence at times and fracture of the family of faith.

This is all very well and good,

but it leaves the truth of this revelation in one's head

which is not very well and good.

The Holy Trinity is not an idea to be studied.

It is a relationship to be enjoyed.

The mission of Jesus Christ was about living, not about thinking.

If right thinking leads to right living, then let that progression stand,

but the progression must go all the way to that point of conversion.

We have not done too well as a church about this progression.

In the eyes of far too many, our church is a church of dogmas and rules.

There is no point in disputing what others see,

and we are responsible for what we have shown them.

Jesus had a lot of trouble with a Judaism of laws

that did not prompt and encourage right living.

In years that are gratefully well behind us,

a person became a Catholic as soon as they memorized the rules.

Their preparation was an intellectual endeavor we called: "Instructions."

Now we are beginning to the heart of the matter, the Trinity.

Realizing that it is about living in relationships,

the preparation now takes a long time

because real relationships do not just happen in a month,

so the focus now is moving into a sacramental life,

a way of behaving that comes from the heart

more than knowing the rules in your head.

Even the words used to reveal this truth are about relationship.

Father, Son, Spirit.

It isn't just about God anymore.

If I call God or experience God as "Father"

it changes the relationship between you and me

and so it's not just about God.

If I know, believe, and accept the Incarnation:

Jesus Christ born in the flesh,

it changes the relationship

and so it is no longer about God off somewhere else

all powerful and all knowing.

It is also now about suffering, death, weakness, betrayal,

healing, touching, embracing, forgiving.

If I say I believe in the Holy Spirit,

then it's all about life animated, purposeful, and holy.

If I say I believe in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church,

it means I have transcended the mystery of the Trinity

and begun to live and lead a life that unified, holy, inclusive of others, and inspired by a vision of the

Kingdom of God, our future, proposed and revealed by Jesus Christ.

So if the Trinity is the heart of our faith,

our lives will be the text book from which others may learn and be drawn to God.

We will live in "communion" in "covenant"

and it will not be a rule that brings us to Mass at least once a week,

but a thrilling, life-giving relationship.

While dogmas will develop as they always have historically from the lives of faithful people, it will be their lives, their joy, their courage, their service, their kindness, their peacefulness, and their love that draws others to God.

I think that is what Matthew is proposing when he has Jesus disperse the Apostles and says: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. Know that I am with you always to the end of the age."

Audio Available

244

The Body and Blood of Christ

6/18/2006

Exodus 24:3-8 + Hebrews 9:11-15 + Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Fr. Boyer

As a child, I loved Peanut Butter cookies:

those cookies with the grid on the top

from the fork mom used to press down the dough.

In our house they were kept under lock and key.

I could not control myself.

If I came home from school and smelled them,

I would not rest until I had found them

which meant EAT THEM. ALL OF THEM!

Mom would say:

"If you keep that up you're going to turn into a Peanut Butter Cookie".

My mother was wise from life, but not a great theologian.

Yet, as I earned a degree in theology,

I began to realize how profoundly theological she was.

In terms of cause and effect with a few other details added,

she had it right.

It is what we are doing here with our Communion.

Consume the Word of God, Consume the Body of Christ in the context of the assembly's celebration of the Eucharist, and you will likely become the Body of Christ, holy, precious in God's sight, and be raised up on the last day.

Deep in the human heart embedded in the human psyche is a fear all of us know.

It is the fear of being alone: the fear of abandonment.

Sometimes I think this is one of the little clues of our divine origins

since God's own nature seems to abhor the same thing.

So then comes creation and those words recorded in Genesis:

"It is not good for man to be alone."

It isn't good for God to be alone either.

The first spoken words in the New Testament are: "Fear Not."

Spoken over and over again by angelic messengers,

the divine name at the Incarnation is "Immanuel" (God with us).

The name Immanuel says it all.

Final words at the Gospel's conclusion last week:

"I will be with you always until the end of the ages"

open us to the wonder of the Eucharistic presence.

This relationship we spoke of last week is not inaccessible.

Our greatest fear is set aside by this divine promise

which we by faith recognize in the presence of Christ's Body and Blood.

While the wonder of the Eucharist

ought not be reduced simply to a physical object,

it does begin there with bread and wine.

Relieved of that awful fear, we are free to become Eucharistic people who are capable, willing, and anxious to share in and fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ.

It's as though we, paralyzed by fear, have been cured, restored, freed to get up and walk this world with the message and life of the gospel.

It starts however with the experience and the truth of God's presence in these sacred and holy gifts.

So simple, so accessible, so common, we run the constant risk of taking it for granted.

Like bread on the table at home, we forget easily how essential it is.

And so this feast comes each year to say to us:

Look. Remember.....Take Care.....Approach with fear and reverence.

Bow your head..... Be grateful..... Bend your knee.

You are in the presence of the Lord your God.

There are on many occasions moments in life when words are totally inadequate.

I have experienced that in preparing this homily.

What is there to say?

How can we ever express what we believe here?

I experience the inadequacy of words when I see people get up and go to the restroom during the Eucharistic prayer;

when they stand ten feet from the tabernacle and chat as though they were in a coffee shop.

When people stroll in here as casually as at a ball game, and grab communion on the run like the drive through at Sonic.

The Body and Blood of Christ is what happens when God has nothing more to say and words are inadequate.

The Body and Blood of Christ is what happens when there is nothing more to say, and Presence is all that matters.

This gift, this symbol, this message is like that moment when as a child we fell down, skinned our knee, bumped our head, or fell off the bike, and Mom or Dad said nothing, but swept us up, gathered us close in a loving embrace and simply held us close to their heart.

Audio Available

245

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

6/25/2006

Job 38:1,8-11 + 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 + Mark 4:35-41

Fr. Boyer

There are a couple of details that slip by in these Gospel verses unless like me you have sat with this text for hours recently and preached on it for more than thirty years!

The first is that the disciples call Jesus "Teacher."

Notice that their faith in him is just beginning, and they have made no connection between Jesus and God.

The second detail is that this interaction between the disciples and Jesus happens on water in a boat.

There is a lot of that in Mark's Gospel:

a lot of time in a boat crossing back and forth from one shore to the next.

On one shore are the Jews, on the other shore are the Gentiles.

Jesus is going back and forth in Mark;

talking to both, bridging the gap, drawing them closer,

almost, as it were, introducing them to one another.

The third detail comes from the verb Mark uses to describe

what Jesus does when awakened: REBUKE

This is the verb Mark uses when Jesus confronts an evil spirit. He rebukes

The final detail I want to simply plant in your thinking

is that Jesus accomplishes this wonder by his own power.

He does not say: "By the power of God, be still! Hush! Calm down!"

He simply gives the order by his own command and his own power.

We must notice that just as the disciples in the boat must have noticed

that to start their wondering about who in the world was in that boat with them.

The miracles in Mark's gospel fall into two categories:

healings and exorcisms.

From the very beginning Mark shows almost a fascination with exorcisms.

I'm just guessing, but I would think he probably has more exorcism stories than the other three Gospel writers.

These conflicts with evil that he describes are always violent struggles, described in frightening detail.

The Jesus of Mark's Gospel is always the vigilant victor in a power struggle with evil.

These ancient peoples who lived along the rim of the Great Sea

carried in their culture wild mythical stories of evil

depicted as a monster rising from a boiling sea.

We suspect that images of Creation have their roots in these stories.

And so in Genesis, God draws from the wild waters of chaos,

order, calm, peaceful, dry land on which He establishes paradise.

It is the beginning of primitive man's understanding of and belief in God.

Mark draws upon the memories of those ancient stories and primitive beliefs to reveal the divine Jesus Christ who like or because he is God can defeat and control the awesome and frightening powers of the deep and like the Creator/God, draw from chaos and disorder, the new paradise: The Kingdom of God.

This time however, the chaos and disorder is not really the sea and what is out there.

It is the chaos and disorder of a split and polarized world of Gentiles and Jews – the two symbolic sides of that Lake, and the chaos and fear of these otherwise brave, competent fishermen.

I am beginning to imagine with some amusement a slightly different version of this event.

Imagine with me the storm on the lake, the sleeping Jesus who has been taken on this boat ride to get him out of the crowd which has been chasing him around and wearing him out.

His friends are worried that he's over worked and needs some rest, so out they go for an afternoon on the lake.

The storm comes up, but Jesus, so tired sleeps through it to the point that he might be lost if the boat the swamps.

The rudely wake him up with their shouting and frightened screams because this storm is greater than they had ever experienced.

This Jesus who has early that day shown them that he is afraid of nothing, having just won a contest of will and power over an evil spirit, is awakened from a wonderful and restful nap by this racket from his friends.

What if? Perhaps? at least in my version, he turns to the disciples rather than to the wind and sea, and says the same thing:

BE QUIET! CALM DOWN! (Under his breath he says: "Can't you see I'm trying to sleep here?")

Sometimes I think it would be easier to calm the wind and the sea than to calm a terrified people, but that is what he is about among us.

It is, in the end, what his mission is about: crossing the lake of our polarized lives, calling us together, calming us down, rebuking in us the demons of fear, doubt, confusion, violence, distrust, racism, --- whatever, and drawing from the stormy depths of our lives the new creation, the new paradise which he liked to call, the Kingdom of God

Audio Available

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13th Sunday of Ordinary Time

7/2/2006

Wisdom 1.13-15; 2.23-24 + 2 Corinthians 8.7, 9,13-15 + Mark 5.21-43

Fr. Boyer

After twenty minutes of driving around the parking lot, a desperate shopper looked heavenward and said: "Lord if you help me find a parking place, I will go to Mass every Sunday for the rest of my life." At that moment, a parking spot opened. The shopper looked to heaven and again said: "Never mind, I found one."

And with that thought, we are face to face with two desperate people: a highly placed, influential synagogue official and a woman who for twelve years has been isolated, untouchable, and helpless because of a flow of blood which in her culture made her unclean, impure, and totally isolated from human contact.

Again this week we hear of astonishment at what Jesus does, and wonder about what has happened and who is in our midst.

The stories of today's Gospel come after another sea journey from one shore to the next.

These sea stories are numerous and important in Mark's Gospel.

The miracle stories today belong together, and the little subtle link is the number twelve.

For twelve years the woman has suffered – exactly the age of the synagogue officials' daughter.

Desperation is all they seem to have in common; this powerful influential man and this poor isolated, helpless woman..... except for their faith which gives them both access and the attention of Jesus.

He does not see wealth or poverty, power or helplessness. He sees only their faith.

They both fall down at his feet – one in front of everyone at the face of Jesus, the other crawling through the crowd behind him.

In both stories, the power of human touch is unmistakable.

"Lay hands on her." begs the official, Jarius.

"If I can just touch his garment....." thinks the woman.

What Mark puts before us after that sea journey across the sea is a contrast of faith.

"Little faith" last week on the part of the disciples in the boat who need to be calmed down; and great faith on the part of a desperate man and a desperate woman.

The two teach us something about death.

Untouched for twelve years, unclean, and now penniless,

the woman for all practical purposes has been dead;

and death has come to the home of Jarius.

The helpless, hopeless crowd ridicules Jesus,

and the scoffing disciples question how he could ever know who touched him in that pushing, shoving crowd.

But he dismisses their silly question and he puts the crowd out of the house.

These emotions of doubt and fear have no place or power where He is present.

They must go.

And when they are gone, the girl rises restored to life and her family.

And also rising up, standing before Jesus, the woman is restored to life, raised up from her slowly consuming death and twelve years of isolation.

And Jesus calls her "daughter" – affirming that she is a child of God.

Jarius gets his daughter,

God gets his daughter

all because of a faith that has overcome fear.

On a hot summer Sunday in the mist of a holiday weekend,
we take nourishment and hope from this place.

We find in the First Reading from a Book written just before the time of Jesus,
the way to interpret and integrate this Gospel message into our lives.

Listen to it again in light of these details from Mark 5.

“God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.

For he fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome,
and there is not a destructive drug among them nor any domain of the netherworld on earth, for justice
is undying. For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. But by
the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who belong to his company experience it.”

As our nation celebrates its hope for and foundation on the ideals of liberty,
we have reason to celebrate even more profoundly the freedom we have found in Jesus Christ.

No Declaration of Independence can cause freedom. It can only express the ideal.

But God can, does, and wills that we be free:

free of fear, free of doubt, free of death.

Because of this, we may declare what we hope for

and record in writing for other generations the Enlightenment’s version of Rights of Human Kind.

The idea that we are created equal is lived in the ministry of Jesus
and experienced by an influential synagogue official and an outcast, unclean, penniless woman.

Jesus doesn’t know the difference between them because he sees with the eye of God.

We might well pray this weekend in thanksgiving for the faith that we do have

and for even greater faith that might cast out our fears and our doubts.

In a nation that holds our lofty ideals, there is still too much power and influence, deciding who is really
free and who is not, who lives and who dies, who is in and who is out.

Fear these days still shapes our decisions and our visions.

It becomes a tool for the savvy to manipulate opinion.

Yet Christ still comes to cast it out, to silence those who scoff at thoughts of peace,

and dismiss those who ridicule the idea that life is more precious in God’s sight than any death.

The woman of this Gospel models the faith Mark would teach us.

She points to the power of faith in Jesus.

She is anonymous and therefore stands for us all.

She is an ordinary person who speaks her faith and builds up the community in her generation.

She first put her trust in the professionals; the “doctors” Mark calls them.

It was the wrong place to put her trust and her faith.

Until she turned to Jesus, she was doomed.

Shall it be so for us?

Who is going to bring us peace, stop violence and killing, cast out fear and distrust?

The Pentagon? The Congress? The Courts? The Presidency?

These are the “doctors” of our time.

We are spending all that we have, and almost nothing is left.

Only Jesus Christ.

Only hearing and believing what the Book of WISDOM says will restore us and preserve us.

“In the image of God’s own nature we have been made and all creatures are wholesome.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Audio Available

Colossians 3:14-21

Fr. Boyer

"Beloved,

Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs. Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through Him."

At the center of every sound is the "tiny whisper (1 King 19:12) that the prophet Elijah overheard at the mouth of his cave. Every tone, every melody, every instrument, every song imitates that one divine Word which God spoke at the very beginning; the Word that split the swirling waters, pulled up the dry land, and made possible the lush garden for wind singing in the trees with the chirp of birds. That one single divine cry hurled the fire of the universe into existence and made possible the human cries and whispers that have hummed melodies, consoled crying children, mourned the dying, and enchanted lovers of every age, continent, and tongue.

We make music when we are in love – in love with God's voice. Like anyone in love, we long to hear that voice again and again, and we feel that if we do not express our love, it will die. Like the great American hymn says: "Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?"

Music unveils the dimension of meaning and feeling that word can never yield. Music speaks with the voice of the Holy Spirit, since, as Paul says in Romans 8, "we do not always pray as we ought." So the "Spirit itself bears witness without spirit that we are children of God." That Spirit picks up the song of our heart, crying out to God for us, within us, praying when we do not know how. When our hearts beat faster because of music we hear and sing, when our feet tap to tunes we did not even know we were listening to, when our eyes pool with tearful longing, with what our minds cannot say, we know in the resonant vibrations of our very bodies that all creation is groaning to speak of God. (Romans 8.21)

The Organ we dedicate today is the sound of prayer rising; its 70 stops, its viola, gemshorn, crumhorn, trumpets, flutes, and chimes reflect some of the best that humans can do to permit the resonant voice of God to speak. When we hear organists play its four manuals, we will truly be able to listen to the Spirit's yearning. But when the Organ supports a choir of human voices we attend to something more. For here, the Organ ministers to us --- the Assembly of God's people; in supporting the music of our lives, the Organ serves our ability to express our faith, our hope, and our love.

The struggle to hear God is not always easy. Our prayer as Christians is born of the Cross of Christ, so it is fitting that we should dedicate this instrument just at the end of the Easter Season and that its console will sit under the Cross of Christ. No Christian can forget the sacrifice of the one man that gave us new life; daily, our baptismal promises remind us of it. In addition, no Christian should ignore the horrifying realities in our world – that our redemption is unfinished until there exists for all a creative peace, not war; sufficient sustenance and housing for the poor, not hunger and homelessness; and tolerance, compassion, and inclusion, instead of violence, abuse and division. The wounds of Christ, now glorified, still remind us of our mission in the world. An Organ therefore, must not only support our joyful triumph

as believers, but must prophesy that the pain of our world, the suffering of the innocent, and the loss of the dead can be transformed. The voice of this Organ must become a prayerful lament and a grating prophecy. It recalls the bloody sacrifice of the innocents in our world who have died trying to change it for the better; it announces a holy city, "new heaven and a new earth" where there will be no more tears, pain, or death, for the "old order has passed away" (Revelations 21.1-4)

Music is prayer, prophecy, and lament; this Organ will sing all three for us, with us, and to us. In its sounds, we will "be thankful," as our reading the letter to the Colossians says (Colossians 3:15). We will learn to teach and admonish one another, building up this parish, this people of God at Saint Mark. It is now more than fifteen years since this parish organized itself around the Word of God and the Gospel of Saint Mark. In that time, much has changed, but not the Gospel. We still proclaim that the voice of God calls us to worship in faith and love, to mourn our sinfulness, and to prophesy justice and peace in our world. In every syllable we speak, in every sound we make, we yearn to hear the overtones that intimate to us the God has not left us orphans, but has molded us into a people, the adopted children of God.

In this Organ and in our songs of praise, we release from things of this earth the sweet music of heaven. May it always be so from now until the end of the ages.

No Audio Available

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14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

7/9/2006

Ez 2:2-5 + Ps 123:1-4 + 2 Cor 12:7-10 + Mk 6:1-6

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

250

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/16/2006

Amos 7:12-15+Ephesians 1:3-14+Mark 6:7-13

Fr. Boyer

While Pentecost is certainly the day the beginning of the church coming to life by the power of the Spirit, this Gospel story is the beginning of the beginning.

This sending or commissioning of the apostles is the most direct and clearly expressed expectation Jesus has for his apostolic people.

While every age has probably heard different pieces of this instruction address its own specific issues,

there are two that stand out for us who are,

by the power of this Gospel instructed on what we are to do, and how.

Because you can not just sit here and listen to this Gospel

and think it was something for the past about twelve guys Jesus called from their work one day, and then left behind.

The Word of God is alive, and it speaks to us, not to them

never more so than when it is proclaimed in the midst of this assembly.

The whole notion of "twelve" being sent carries with it a sense of totality.

"Twelve" in the culture that preserved this Gospel means everyone

because there were twelve tribes that included all of God's people.

So by sending the twelve, no one is excused,

no one is left out.

The first challenge of this instruction

lies in the point that he sent them out two by two.

They did not go alone.

There are no "loners" in the church,

just as we believe that there are no "lone" churches.

By sending them in pairs, the risk of personalizing or misinterpreting the message is minimized.

One keeps the other faithful and true to the message.

This is at the heart of and an essential piece of our identity.

It is why, from every generation, the interpretation of the messages is not a private, personal matter.

We do it together, as a church in communion.

Even more so, this instruction speaks a word of challenge and correction to this age of individualism.

It is why we are not a stand alone church here on Tecumseh Road.

We belong to something bigger. When we do anything we must be accountable for what affect it has on others.

"Going it alone." is not the way of disciples of Jesus.

We are not in "private practice".

We belong together, and when we are not together in unity, we are not a church, at least not the church that springs from the instruction of Jesus.

This is not just a matter of life.

This challenge address national foreign policy as well as neighborhood life.

The second challenge is just as important as the first.

It concerns the matter of what to take. It is a subtle instruction, and the idea runs counter to much of our way of life.

Not getting the point causes us a lot of spiritual distress.

“Take nothing.” he says.

Jesus was definitely not a Boy Scout.

“Be prepared.” says their motto.

Not so with Jesus and his mission.

Our plans too often get in the way.

We get our ideas about how things ought to be for the coming of the kingdom, and then when God’s plan crosses ours, it all gets fouled up.

The Kingdom of God is breaking in all around us,

and sometimes we get so caught up in our plans, in our dreams, in our expectations about how it’s supposed to be, we fail to see it, or worse yet,

we slow down and delay the plan of God.

The instruction of Jesus is simple: “Go.”

Just “Go.” he says. Don’t worry about how it’s going work out.

Stop being anxious about what you’re supposed to do or what you are supposed to say.

Just go, and live the Gospel proclaimed to us.

Be a people of Joy, a people of Peace, a People of Forgiveness.

God does not need out plan.

Tragedies, set-backs, disappointments do not stop the plan of God, nor do they deter God’s people from becoming what they were sent to be.

Audio Available

251

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/23/2006

Jeremiah 23: 1-6 +Ephesians 2:13-18 +Mark 6:30-34

Fr. Boyer

Such a short Gospel passage, but so much going on!
There's that boat again taking them to the other side.

We have had boat trips with Mark's Gospel before,
always crossing over the waters.

When you hear those stories, think of the church:

think of companionship,

think of how to get from this side to the other side,

and when you do,

you are embraced by the richness of Mark's images and message.

Then there is that deserted place he takes them to.

There is nothing there.

Lest they think that all they had done and taught was about them,
he took them off to remind them

that God was the source of their gifts,

God was the one who really sent them,

and it was God's mission they were to be about.

Then there is that crowd who never go away,

from whose needs there is no hiding place.

Finally the best lesson of all.

When there was every reason for frustration and impatience,

Pity was what they received from Jesus,

and instead of saying: "Can't you see I want to be alone?"

He began to teach them many things.

The first challenge we have from this Gospel is to place ourselves in this story.

If, as I said last week, he sent out the "twelve",

which means everyone is sent, then there are no spectators.

So, we might wonder a bit this morning

about what report we could give on what we have done and taught.

But maybe the story is not just about these apostles or apostolic people.

Perhaps it is about people who will seek Jesus not matter what the inconvenience.

Getting to the other side of that lake is no easy walk.

Those people had to go to that desert to find him.

Next week we shall hear more of what they received from him.

There is then a place in this story for those who have needs.

Mark tells us what we shall find if we are willing to go after it.

Finally, there is Jesus.

What he does, any of us can do. Nothing extra ordinary nor particularly divine.

He has pity.

He sets aside his own plans and agenda to be attentive to others.

I like to think it's about "interruptions."

Long ago I discovered

that the interruptions of my day are most often the best moments of my day.
He thought he would have a great time in that deserted place
listening to the apostles.
Instead he had a better time teaching that crowd
who sought him at considerable inconvenience about his Father.
So much for his plans!
Because he could surrender them without complaint or resentment,
more wonderful things happened.

So, on a hot July weekend after a blistering week of terrible heat,
we gather here in a somewhat deserted place.
We are reminded as we do so that we shall eventually have to report
on what we have done and what we have taught.
We are reminded that making the journey here with our needs
in spite of the inconveniences and much more comfortable options
is where we ought to be with the one who receives us
with patience and pity, understanding and concern.
We are reminded too that our agenda, our plans, our expectations
might well be interrupted by the needs of others,
and that no matter where we try to hide from or deny them,
the needs of others will not go away.
The only response to those needs
fitting for those who would be in this boat with Jesus
is patience, pity, and a response that is truly divine.

We have to find our place in this story.

Audio Available

252

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

7/30/2006

2 Kings 4:42-44 + Ephesians 4:1-6 + John 6: 1-15

Fr. Boyer

Now never mind for the moment that we have switched from Mark to John for Gospel reading, just follow the flow of the story.

Jesus has crossed to the other side.

The crowd has run after him.

He has gone up the mountain to teach them.

The place where things happen in the Gospel is always important if the writer takes the trouble to provide that information.

The mountain is the place where the human and the divine meet.

Jesus is seated in the posture of a rabbi/teacher,

and he teaches them about how the divine and the human work together.

The lesson concerns two ways of seeing things, and Peter provides the example.

He sees five loaves and two fish. He sees too little for so many.

Jesus sees things with the eyes of the Spirit: he looks up!

Then he tests the disciples; not to see if they pass or fail, but simply to measure how far they have come in the Spirit.

He wants to know if they can perceive the revelation about to be given.

Philip and Andrew are stuck the material present.

When they hear "bread", they think of flour and water.

When they see people, they want to count them; and they know one thing that never changes: scarcity.

Too many people, too little food, not enough money, stuck in the material, they think it is impossible.

They do not understand how to bring the spiritual to the material.

They know scarcity. Jesus knows abundance.

In John's Gospel that contrast started at a wedding in Cana.

This is the Spiritual law the disciples must learn.

Jesus has them sit down on the grass.....

Are you thinking of that psalm verse? "He makes me lie down in green pastures?" You should be.

For Jesus, these people are not hungry for bread.

These people have no soul, and Jesus is going to restore it.

When the divine and human meet, this is what happens.

The Spirit of God enters into the human spirit, as food into the body,

filling that spirit to its capacity (as much as they wanted).

So much so that there are twelve baskets left over.

Get the number: twelve = complete fullness.

It is not bread and fish that fill these people.

They don't say: "Wasn't that good. I believe I'll have seconds."

They begin to recognize a prophet in their midst because their spirits are stirred by the divine presence, but not perfectly so because they want to make him a king.

While awakened to something wonderful, they are still stuck in the material.
So, he withdrew. In typical John dramatic style, the curtain comes down.
End of Act One.

Then just as suddenly, up goes the curtain for Act Two.

The boat again. It's dark. The wind is blowing, the sea is rolling. They were several miles from shore and they see Jesus walking toward them on the water.

He speaks to them the divine name, revealing the mystery of his identity.

He says the name that Moses heard in a burning bush: "I AM."

He comes to people in darkness and fear.

He walks on the chaos that frightens others.

And they do the only smart thing when they know who it is.

They invite him in.

John tells us that they wanted to receive Jesus into the boat with them.

On another summer Sunday, we pause this day because we are hungry.

We come to this table not for bread or wine,

since by any judgment there is not enough to satisfy physical hunger.

We gather on this holy mountain to meet the divine

and remember how the divine and the human work together.

We come to feed our souls on the Word made flesh.

Some of us come already struggling with the darkness, wind, and storms of life.

Some of us will meet them yet later this week.

But there is one who walks above all the chaos this world can rage,

one whose name we know, and the message this day is that he walks toward us

and toward any who will row out away from the safety of the material and physical world.

To those who ask, he enters their boat,

rides along to the other side and sees us safely home.

In Genesis, God gathered the waters that were everywhere into one place

and made dry land appear.

This is the continual action of our present God.

The divine gives people a place to stand so that the terrors

symbolized by the raging sea do not overwhelm them.

When he is there, as the last verse said: "Suddenly they were on the shore."

Audio Available

253

The Transfiguration of the Lord

8/6/2006

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

254

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

8/13/2006

1 Kings 19:4-8 + Ephesians 4:30-5:2 + John 6:41-51

Fr. Boyer

Remember, Jesus is speaking to the people he has just fed.

Their hunger has been satisfied.

They have had all that they need.

In fact, there was a great abundance left over.

But they murmur.

They complain.

They talk among themselves. Their talk is not grateful.

They have missed the point, and failed to understand

not only what they have received, but who they are because of it.

So he teaches them in clear and certain language

with images they cannot fail to grasp.

“They” in this gospel is really “us” in this church.

We are a people who have been fed

not only with more food than we need

because we waste so much,

but we have all that we need of everything else.

Our garages are full, so full our several cars are often on the street.

Many of attics are so full there is danger of being buried alive from a collapse.

Our stores and malls are full, our storage units bulge,

and evidence of it all will be the garage sale in the parking lot next Saturday!

Yet there is murmuring.

We keep all his stuff because deep down inside we fear we may need it.

We secretly suspect that God will not provide any more

so be better keep what we have.

We murmur when it isn't good enough,

breaks down, gets old, and needs to be replaced.

We run the constant risk of getting stuck here in all this stuff

and failing to move beyond it, move deeper into what it means,

and instead of it bring us life and closer to the one who provides,

it destroys and shortens our lives as we fight over it,

work ourselves to death to get more of it,

and never really hear what God has to say.

The Word of God speaks today to people

who have been fed more than enough

who are being drawn to God

and invited into the same relationship with God that Jesus himself enjoys.

If that is not you and me,

then this Gospel is little more than a piece of pulp fiction.

The issue is, who are we and what has happened to us with all this stuff we enjoy?

As Jesus looks at those he fed and cared for so abundantly, he looks at us and speaks these words to reveal the presence of God, not in heaven, but a God who has come down.

What he reveals to us is first of all that

we are called to something greater than all this – something beyond all the stuff we have been blessed with in this life.

This stuff is “manna” --- but there is something greater than “manna”.

This stuff cannot give us life. In fact, if it’s all we want, we shall die in it.

This Gospel of John is not being proclaimed to unbelievers, to people not blessed or hungry

but to people who have already been drawn to Jesus.

This Gospel of John awakens us to what has already happened, to what has already been given to us.

The fact that we are drawn to Jesus bears witness to the truth that we have already begun to know the Father who sent him.

That is why Jesus attracts us, because we see the Father in him,

hear the love of God in his words, and experience the love and presence, forgiveness and peace of God in his words and deeds.

If we dare to move deeper into this mystery or this wonder,

if we dare to “eat” and “drink” this presence

dare to take it into ourselves and make it our identity as food becomes our flesh and blood by eating it, that divine life, the divine presence, that eternal life is ours.

There will be nothing to murmur about when that happens.

There will be no more empty seats in this church,

and the line at Communion will stretch from here to the river.

No one will have stayed home at this hour.

Their absence says more about us than about them.

When we dare to move into this mystery and wonder,

there will be no more bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, or reviling.

All malice will be gone.

We will be kind to one another, compassionate,

forgiving one another as God has forgiven us in Christ.

We will be imitators of God, as God’s children living in love.

Audio Available

255

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

8/15/2006

Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10 + 1 Corinthians 15:20-27 + Luke 1:39-56

Fr. Boyer

It's a story of pilgrims and of barrenness that we proclaim on this Holy Day.

It's a story of two women, one old and the other young.

It's also the story of everyone making life's pilgrimage; both old and young.

The fact is, we are all a barren people:

some of us like Elizabeth who has lived on this earth a long time
with little if anything to show for it and even less to leave behind;

some of us like Mary young and full of youthful dreams

all interrupted by a divine surprise that through her life into turmoil.

With lives in transition, they meet as spiritual pilgrims, lives open to God and willing to explore for the sake of goodness the divine plan for their lives.

For one it has taken a long time, for the other, it is just at the beginning.

Yet through the sons they bore, the Spirit begins a new age, a new creation in which we find the Kingdom of God. It is the age of the Spirit.

They have both been filled with it.

For one that Spirit brings life.

For the other that Spirit bring Joy.

It is the end of the ear of barrenness.

Caught in the rapture of that Spirit, Elizabeth sings the first "Ave Maria."

Benedicta Tu In Mulieribus: Blessed are you among women.

She sings with such Spirit that the child she carries leaps for joy.

The barrenness of human life is at an end.

All human life is now filled with the divine presence.

The barrenness of sin is now destroyed by this Spirit
which will bear fruit in a divine visitor in human flesh
that makes us all leap for joy.

We are a people whose lives are in transition.

Today we meet in this place like Mary and Elizabeth:
some old and some young.

Hope and Joy, Life and Holiness are stirring with in us.

This day we proclaim that our barrenness is at an end.

This day we proclaim that those who are obedient
and give flesh to the Word of God

will be filled with the Spirit

and one day be in the presence of God

for death has no power over them.

Audio Available

256

The 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

8/27/2006

Joshua 24:1-2, 15-17, 18+Ephesians 5:21-32+John 6:60-69

Fr. Boyer

None of us get to choose how we are going to die, or when.

We only get to choose how we are going to live.

That kind of living becomes a constant process of deciding what we are going to do.

From decisions between vanilla or chocolate, rye or whole wheat,

which paint to choose or restaurant for an evening out,

we move on to decisions about career, a partner with whom to grow old,

the choice of friends, or a decision to allow an unborn child the freedom to live.

Decisions enable us to fulfill the deepest capacity of our real lives.

There are also circumstances in every life that are beyond control

leaving us with what seems like no choice at all.

Some years ago I learned a powerful lesson about this from man with AIDS.

He said: "AIDS offers me a choice: the choice to become a hopeless victim and die, or make my life right now what it always ought to have been."

Even when things seem hopeless, leaving us confused, and helpless, we can always choose our attitude.

It's always about making the right decisions

for becoming fully who we are, fully human, and fully alive.

We hear of such choices in the scriptures for this day.

First Joshua who succeeded Moses as leader of the Israelites

challenges his brothers and sisters to choose who they would serve.

The challenge comes at a crisis in their lives, and it is a turning point in the Old Testament.

Then the author of Ephesians calls for a decision

that evokes mutual caring, love, and fidelity in the model of Christ.

The choice of a relationship wherein one would lay down their life for the other

is a total abandonment of the perks and privileges of that culture's patriarchal system

for the sake of a mutuality never lived before.

Finally, the disciples of Jesus who have come to believe and be convinced

reveal their dilemma: "To whom shall we go?"

The choice to be made in light of what is revealed in this Gospel

is the ultimate turning point of the New Testament.

Those who leave will eat the bread of this earth, and they shall remain hungry and die.

Those who believe and are convinced

that the Son of God has spoken these words which are true

will never hunger or die.

But they must do more than believe.

They must be convinced.

Once convinced, they will have no other direction for their lives.

Refusing the gift of living bread and all it signifies is walking away from Jesus.

Putting anything ahead of being in this place when this bread and body are broken

is walking away from Jesus.

It is not a matter of convenience or of feeling like it,
it is a matter of being convinced: conviction!

Leaving this altar for a congregation of praise, or fellowship, or “feel good church”
is walking away from the Bread of Life.

This is the defining moment in all the New Testament.

There are two steps to be understood in this Gospel by the response of the people.

There is more than faith at work here.

Faith is the first step, but there is another to follow:

that is understanding, or “being convinced” as Peter says it in the final verse today.

When we reach that step and live with conviction,

eternal life will already be flowing within us,

and shall have accomplished what was begun in our baptism.

The Spirit will have filled us, possessed us, purified us, and enlightened us.

We shall see the risen Christ in the Communion of Saints around us at this altar.

We shall speak of and live in peace proclaiming forgiveness.

We shall choose life, we shall choose life in the Bread of Life before all else,

and like these disciples before us, we shall choose the Holy One of God.

Audio Available

257

The 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/3/2006

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8 + James 1:17-18,21-27 + Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Fr. Boyer

“Labor Day” this is called.

It’s an odd idea these days when you stop to think about it.

I went to the U.S. Department of Labor web site

to find out more about how this all got started.

It would appear that they are a little fuzzy about that

which is no surprise given how “fuzzy” this nation has become about labor.

It would seem that “unions” which we as church continue to support

have been demonized nearly out of existence: if not, certainly out of power

in a “right-to-work” state.

I remember how we were assured that changing that law

was going to flood Oklahoma with good paying jobs and investment.

Since then, GM closed, and judging from the calls for help with rent and utilities,

those companies standing at the state line ready to rush in have not done so.

In the meantime, the real laborers in this country are threatened with deportation.

Families of those who labor are subject to the nightmare of having the working member held for months

in a detention cell until they are hauled over the border.

We want laborers to roof our homes, lay bricks, mow grass, change sheets in hotels they could never

afford to stay in, and wash dishes in our restaurants.

While above all, we must keep the cost of these things as low as possible.

So we have “Labor Day” mostly celebrated by employers rather than employees.

It has become a day tolerated but hardly “celebrated” by far too many

in a country where the minimum wage guarantees poverty for labor

while politicians attack each other and dither about trivia

instead of health insurance or transportation costs.

As Jesus once challenged external behavior that did not match internal values,

we might apply the same question/and/challenge process to ourselves.

The issue in the Gospel of Mark today is purity.

This is not a virtue that has anything to do with dirty hands or sex.

It has to do with right thinking and right behavior.

This is the conflict Jesus exposes with the Pharisees.

Their shallow thinking is about trivia.

Unable to look into the heart, they would rather inspect hands,

but Jesus looks to the heart where ironically,

both good and evil are first found.

Evil comes from within.

If our minds are full of envy, greed, anger, adultery, pride,

or if we lie to ourselves, we shall not ever know truth, be free, or be pure.

The intent of Jesus is to find the driver of immoral behavior.

In truth, this evil is not easy to discover,

especially if you are trying to find your own.

The pursuit of it will never be successful

for the shallow who are distracted by trivia.

Going inside takes courage.

It's dark in there, and there are things that make us uneasy and uncomfortable.

It is more fun to be entertained.

Knowing, naming, recognizing the hidden holdings of the mind and heart is often a blow to the scrubbed up and idealized self image we like to project.

Mow the lawn, edge the sidewalk and rake the leaves in the yard,
while inside the house there is abuse, neglect,
and a life-time of unforgiven ugly memories.

There are five markers of true religion.

1) Closeness to God, or rather, God's closeness to us.

We heard that in the first reading today.

2) The pursuit of Justice is the second.

It is the way God's closeness is best experienced.

The Psalm of this day speaks to this truth.

3) Action which bears witness to faith is the third
because words without deeds are shallow and empty.

The Epistle of James speaks with simple eloquence of this truth.

4) Knowing the difference between what is marginal from what is essential
marks true religion. Piety is not to be mistaken for holiness.

5) Finally, what is within matters most.

Therefore, in true religion, the really holy avoid evil thoughts.

Those who look good or do good things

while their hearts are filled with darkness are far from the light of Christ.

What makes holiness is attitude, not behavior.

When the Word of God has taken root in us,
everything becomes a religious practice.

That Word comes through the teachings of our faith,
the example of good people around us,
and through the wonder and beauty of creation.

However it comes, when it does take hold of us,
our inner eye is opened, our hearts are softened,
and we turn to God like a flower turns to the sun.

When we are brought to birth in this way,
covenant law becomes sacred, religious practices are cherished
and we are filled with a wonder that saves.

Audio Available

259

The 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/10/2006

Isaiah 35:4-7 + James 2:1-5 + Mark 7: 31-37

Fr. Boyer

Fear is a big thing these days.

It sells stuff like guns, security systems, gates, locks, and fences.

It has become the greatest political tool for getting votes.

No longer are we concerned about justice or wages, education or poverty.

Now it's all about borders, walls, homeland security,
and it would seem that that best way to get elected is to scare us

into thinking one candidate is more powerful, more militant,
and more able to protect us from whatever it is that scares us the most.

Social and political historians, by the way are quick to point out
that using the tool of fear is a giant step toward

fascism, and all kinds of other ideologies that do not become us.

The opening verses of today's Liturgy of the Word

have directed my prayer and thoughts powerfully and personally this weekend:

"Say to those whose hearts are frightened, be strong, fear not. Here is your God. He comes to save you."

The presence of this God who has called us to this holy place today

is not seen in the removal of stress, problems, or suffering,

but in the fact that in spite of all that,

there is still the possibility of great goodness, great accomplishments,
great growth and satisfaction.

On the eve of a date now recorded in history: 9/11;

we can remember two things and must remember them both:

an unexpected and horrible act of human cruelty,

and a day of greater human courage, goodness and sacrifice.

A handful of angry hate-filled men brought suffering upon a vast number of innocent people;

and then an overwhelming number of brave and courageous men and women risked everything to bring
comfort and help to others.

It is always a curious thing to notice that that in the miracle stories of the Gospel Christ himself
downplays the significance of his healings.

So often healing is followed by Christ telling the one who was cured
not to say anything about it.

Even more emphatically as in today's Gospel,

Christ removes the man from the crowd, off by himself before he cures him.

Christ could have used that power to rid the world of suffering and evil.

He could have just said the word, and all evil would be gone.

But that would not have been true to the plan of his Father,
not according to the divine design for salvation.

It was not to come through power,

but through choice, through conversion of mind and heart.

The real significance of miracle stories

is not so much that they are sweeping displays of divine power,
but rather that they are personal acts of goodness,
and moments of a human being using whatever resource was at hand
to help another.

That is what happens in this Gospel.

In Jesus, we must see ourselves.

In verses just before today's,
a foreigner comes to Jesus for help with her daughter.
At first he refuses and insultingly denies her request
until he thinks better of it.

In Jesus, we must see ourselves.

If at first we think someone does not deserve help,
perhaps we ought to think again.

A God who is partial to the poor
ought to make us uneasy in our prosperity.

It ought to make us want to get in touch with our interior poverty
our deafness to the voice of God
our blindness to God's presence
and the fear that holds us captive.

The only thing we really need to fear
is the fact that we might fail to answer our call to growth in personal goodness.

There is something every one of us can do
about loneliness, hunger, sadness, and suffering.

Fear always puts up walls, locks closed doors, and pulls the shades.

It makes us blind, deaf, and silent.

"BE OPENED" says Jesus.

He puts his fingers in the man's ears.

I think he was silencing the frightening noise of the outside
so that the man could hear from within the call of God and
the whisper of divine love that calms fear.

The prophet has spoken:

BE STONG. HAVE NO FEAR. GOD IS HERE.

Audio Available

260

The 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

9/17/2006

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

261

The 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

9/24/2006

Wisdom 2:12,17-20 + James 3:16-4:3 + Mark 9: 30-37

Fr. Boyer

Two others will speak with you today later in the Liturgy. For that reason, I shall be brief with my reflection upon this Gospel. I beg you to extend courtesy to the others I shall introduce, and remain in this church until the dismissal in order to give them a welcome and attention. Having five additional minutes outside this church or getting out of the parking lot first cannot be worth the discourtesy of not giving them your time.

Jesus speaks to his disciples today about something they do not want to hear about and so they fall silent and uncomfortable. He speaks in this congregation today too when this Gospel is proclaimed. He speaks about something we would rather not talk about and too find uncomfortable. This discomfort reveals then and now reveals the distance between how we think and how Jesus thinks. Be your own judge of that for yourselves. If you find the message uncomfortable and unwelcome, it may very well be the measure of that distance.

When he sits down, he is teaching, and today he sits down to give a lesson in the ways of greatness. For Jesus, the great are those who engage and cooperate with the loving energy of God. That energy is never concerned with its own prestige, honor, or security. Rather it goes out to find and lift up basic humanity. So the truly great will seek and provide for the needs of others, and their greatness lies in that focus, not in taking care of themselves. "How it is" with God who is first and greatest, should be "how it is" with all who seek to be first and great.

In a few minutes, "the children" are going to be put before you again, just as Jesus did once before. The weak, vulnerable, and helpless, the poor, the homeless, the hungry are standing at the door of this church. We just fail to see them because we are on the fast track and looking, working, and living for greatness in the eyes of this world.

When a lesson is taught to a closed or frozen mind, more often than not, that mindset ridicules the teacher, trivializes the matter, or transforms the teaching into some sort of idealistic unreal concept rather than the teaching transforming the mindset. There is no greatness in that thinking. If we shall ever be great, it will be because we have looked outside of ourselves for humanity and seen the face of God. Those who come to us in need have the same feelings, fears, loves, and dreams that we have. Remembering that, and realizing that any one of us is just a breath away from the conditions in which

they find themselves cannot simply make us grateful that we have been spared such needy poverty.
It must make us generous or our gratitude is little more than self serving.
Gratitude without Generosity is false, empty, and self-serving.

Audio Available

262

The 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time
10/1/2006

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

Fr. Boyer

Today we have a Gospel with three scenes:

Pharisees, Disciples, and Children.

The Pharisees come along with one of their trick questions.

Always a trap, never sincere,

they look and wait for ways to discredit Jesus.

He will not play along. He takes neither side in their either or question,

but goes to the heart of the matter which they cannot perceive.

So he steps inside with those who will succeed him

brings them to a new understanding that the Pharisees could never grasp.

For you see, the Pharisees stayed in power and had control

because they kept everyone split up and divided.

Opposition and dispute were their tools.

Once inside with disciples, Jesus lays the foundation for the New Covenant and reveals the Father's original plan.

To help us get the point, the church provides a reading from Genesis today, and reviews for us the Father's plan from the beginning.

"Partner" is the description we hear.

The woman may have been taken from the man,

but the man had no part in it, and he did not even witness it.

They are partners says the author of Genesis describing what God intended.

In this particular story of creation,

the focus is on this relationship.

In his teaching with the disciples,

Jesus restores that balance and partnership

by putting the woman in the case proposed by the Pharisees

on the same footing as the man. They are equal, says Jesus.

Alone, separate, neither of them fulfills the creative design of the God.

But together, living in unity and interdependence,

they are a symbol of restored creation.

Mark's strong stand against divorce is a defense of the unity desired by God.

While Jesus presents a vision of what marriage should be,

he utters no condemnation of those who are divorced.

In fact in the Gospel of John Jesus comes to the defense

of a woman about to be stoned who has often been married.

If this Gospel were really just about marriage,

Jesus would have stayed outside with the Pharisees.

What Mark leads us to as always is a revelation of God's plan

being restored in Jesus his Son.

Now, marriage as God planned it
is not simply a relationship between two people.
Rather, it is a covenant between two people and God.

The binding force is not the vows, nor is it the love between the two people.
The binding force is God's own presence in that Relationship.
Christ did not say "What the marriage ceremony has joined together."
Neither did he say "What Love has joined together."
What he said was: "What God has joined together".
This church is filled with sacraments:
signs of the God's Love, signs of God's presence,
signs of God's healing, forgiving, Love.
Married couples do not receive a sacrament.
They become one.

The lesson of this Gospel is not only about marriage however.
It is about unity and oneness;
about the reality of God's presence where there is unity and oneness.
The challenge of this gospel is not just found in divorce.
It is found where ever we separate what God intended to be one.
In our society, in our church, even in our families,
issues of race, economics, gender, sexuality, justice, and life
leave us divided, not speaking, alienated, hostile, and even violent.

Then comes the third scene: the children.
What a powerful and disturbing image it is.
Jesus surrounded by children, embracing them calling them, blessing them.
It is an image that must haunt the Christian conscience
as we see the horror of malnourished and disease-ridden children
at home and abroad who in their innocence bear the suffering
caused by the collapse of the human family,
and the division of this world into haves and have-nots.

Jesus rebukes those who would separate him from the children.
He rebukes those who ignore the lesson children teach us
about how utterly dependent we are upon one another.
To realize that, and to rejoice in it,
is to honor indeed what God has joined together.

Audio Available

264

The 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time

10/15/2006

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

265

The 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

10/22/2006

Isaiah 53: 10-11 + Hebrews 4: 14-16 + Mark 10:35-45

Fr. Boyer

The basic trouble in the human community right now is that people wish to do as little as possible and to get as much as possible. In contrast to that condition we proclaim verses of Mark's Gospel today that tell about Mark, about James and John, and about the standard of greatness that Jesus proposes.

These verses tell us about Mark because he does not hesitate to show us apostles as they really were, allowing us to include ourselves among those called to greatness and faith.

These verses tell us about James and John because they were children of privilege, ambitious, inconsiderate, and slow to understand.

From we are told of their family, they came from comfortable surroundings with a father who had hired hands and probably some power and status. What their boldness reveals today is that they thought this might provide them with some privilege, thinking they had influence and deserved a place of honor without paying the price of admission. Yet in spite of their flaws and that not too perfect faith, they believed in Jesus.

These verses also tell us about the standard of greatness Jesus has come to propose to those who would claim him as their Lord, Leader, and Example.

When he speaks of drinking from a cup, it is metaphor that means sharing in one's life. It was a custom in that culture to share a drink from a common cup with someone who was sharing an experience of life with you. When he speaks of baptism, he is not speaking of a religious ritual, he is using the Greek word literally which means submersion. So the proposal refers to being totally submerged into an experience, in the sense that someone might be "submerged" in debt. What he offers those of us who will be his disciples is a share in his experience of being God's child, God's chosen one. What he offers those of us who will be his disciples is a complete submersion into his experience of service and sacrifice which leads to exaltation and a place at the right hand of God.

Greatness for followers of Jesus will come from sacrifice, freely embraced and totally fulfilled.

It will not come from status or privilege.

It is only when we are filled with the desire to put into life more than we take out, that is, to serve others,

that life for ourselves and for others can be happy and prosperous.

Only then shall we “approach the throne of grace” as the Letter to the Hebrews calls it today, and only then shall we know mercy and grace, joy and peace.

Audio Available

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52

Fr. Boyer

This blind man is making a lot of noise.

He is shouting loudly, and he says something that brings Jesus to halt.

It is the only time in Mark's Gospel when Jesus is called: "Son of David."

This is startling. It is the title of the Messiah.

The blind man has just shouted out what Jesus has been telling people not to do.

There has been a momentum building in Mark's Gospel since chapter 8 when Jesus began his final journey to Jerusalem with the healing of a blind.

That first healing story did not go very well.

It took two tries on the part of Jesus to bring him to sight.

In that story, some people brought the blind man to Jesus, and when it was over, the man, nameless simply disappears.

In the two chapters held together by these blind-man stories,

Jesus has spoken of what will happen to him in Jerusalem.

The disciples have not gotten the point. They slow and incomplete faith has not let them see what is unfolding in their lives and in the life of their teacher.

Now this blind man brings everything to halt.

Mark tells us that Jesus stopped.

Suddenly this momentum,

this constant turmoil so characteristic of Mark's Gospel is still.

You can almost feel that sense of wonder: "What's going to happen now?"

Many tried to shut the man up,

but nothing will silence the cry of anyone who knows the presence of the Messiah.

Nothing will keep him from crying out and bearing witness to his faith,

because by that faith he can see, understand, and believe who it is that has come.

And then Jesus says what might seem like the most preposterous thing.

He says to a blind man – to someone who can't see: "Come here."

Think for a minute about that command.

How is a blind man going to do that? He can't see to walk, but this blind man who can perceive his salvation responds to what at first seems like an impossible command.

And then the most dramatic gesture occurs.

He throws off his cloak, the garment in which people would drop their alms.

He abandons his old way of life at the invitation of Jesus because he has faith.

Not until he rises up from his old ways,

not until he throws aside his cloak,

not until he comes to Jesus does anything happen to him.

He could have shouted: "Can't you understand, I'm blind?"

Or, "I can't, I'm afraid to move around."

He could have said: "You come here and help me."

But he didn't. He took the risk of getting up and going to Jesus,

and when he did everything changed.

The biggest change of all however, is not the healing of his eyes. It is the change of his life. Unlike the blind man of chapter eight, this blind man, says Saint Mark began to follow the “way.” I don’t think he is speaking of a road. There is another more profound meaning to the following Jesus “on the way.”

Bartimaeus is our teacher today.
A blind man leads us.
He is driven by a desire to see and understand the revelation of the Son of David.
This desire is not intellectual curiosity.
It is a sense that salvation lies in greater and greater penetration of the mystery of God and humanity,
and the mystery of the Divine and the Human.

For those of us who have assembled in this holy place,
for those of us who got up today and came to Jesus in this Eucharist,
there is a growing desire to understand and enter into the revelation of the Cross and Resurrection.
Everyday we must beg the Father of Jesus to have mercy on our blindness.
and every day we must throw aside the cloaks of our past,
get up, stumble around if that’s what happens, and start begging for what matters, not money, gifts, and security,
but begging for enough wisdom, sight, understanding and faith
to take up the ways of Jesus and make them our own.

Audio Available

267

All Saints

11/1/2006

8:20 AM

Revelation 7:2-4,9-14 + 1 John 3:1-3 + Matthew 5:1-12

Abp. Beltran

No Audio Available

268

All Saints

11/1/2006

7:00 PM

Revelation 7:2-4,9-14 + 1 John 3:1-3 + Matthew 5:1-12

Fr. Boyer

There is no point in observing and celebrating All Saints Day if that observance is all about the past and some holy people of long ago.. In my own spirituality, I have ceased thinking of this day as though it was about "them" – saints of our past, heroes long gone. It is shallow and short sighted to think that this is a sort of "collective feast" that makes sure no one is left out. I prefer to think of this day as an annual checkup, an occasion to look within rather than look around or look back. Those who take their physical health seriously have annual checkups, It is suggested that we see our dentist for a check on teeth, and even our cars, get tune-ups and an occasional check of the fluids. How should it be different for the spiritual side of our lives? The Gospel today reveals the qualifications for holiness. It sets the standards or the marks against which we check our lives. There are standards for blood pressure and blood sugar that get checked. Here in this Gospel are the minimum standards for spiritual health.

Poor in spirit, meek, just, pure, and peaceful are the standards against which we measure our holiness. Being poor in spirit has to do with how we relate to material things. Gospel poverty does not mean that we own nothing, but rather that things do not own us. Those who mourn are blessed not because they mourn, but because they can mourn; meaning they loved someone enough to feel the sorrow of separation. That is a blessing! Being meek does not mean being passive. It means being honest. It means knowing who you are and what you are not. It is a virtue that puts an end to ambition and pride. Cultivating righteousness in the gospel sense means having a passion for justice not for one's self (self-righteous) but for those who never experience justice. When mercy is found in one's life, it is always about mercy given, not received. Purity is not necessarily about innocence as much as it is about being purified: it's more like being "refined" that is to say, cleansed by sacrifice and service. And the truly holy make peace everywhere they go because they never forget that we are all children of God, brothers and sisters in the human family that God has made in His own image and likeness. The peacemaking holy ones see the face of God in every one of God's children.

So, this is the day, this is the season near the end of the year to check up on things in our souls, and Matthew gives us the check – list because tomorrow's feast is the grim reminder that if we have not

checked ourselves on these things, a judgment time is coming for us all when someone else will, and we know very well what God will be looking for in those called to the eternal banquet.

Audio Available

269

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

11/5/2006

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

270
32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time
11/12/2006

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

271
33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time
11/19/2006

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

272

Feast of Christ the King

11/26/2006

Daniel 7:13-14 – Revelation 1:5-8 + John 18:33-37

Fr. Boyer

“What have you done?” asks Pilot, the judge.

“What have you done?” says the Roman to the Jew?

Pilot is power.

Jesus is servant.

Pilot has heard the word “Kingdom”, and he’s interested,
but he is a political man who wants to clarify this word, “Kingdom.”

Jesus is a spiritual man.

For him, “King” is Pilot’s word.

Pilot is the one using it.

The Spiritual man has a different view.

He is a witness to the truth.

He lives within and by his life reveals the ultimate relationship
to God and creation.

Those fixated on power cannot open this spiritual depth.

Those aware of and seeking the spiritual will hear the voice of Jesus.

The truth they know will draw them to the truth he is.

What it all boils down to is foregoing force.

It is an awesome decision.

The contrast between Pilot and Jesus is not the only one in this larger scene.

There is also the contrast between Peter and Jesus.

The preemptive strike of Peter in the garden seizing a sword
and cutting off an ear provokes a response from Jesus: “No more of this.”
Jesus who has spent his entire ministry getting people to hear his word
restores the man’s ear.

What he teaches is that the beginning of violence is the end of dialogue.

Combatants can no longer hear one another:

not just national, racial, or religious combatants.

It works in our homes as well.

The other night while on vacation, I was awakened by a violent, vicious argument
in a condo somewhere in the building.

A man and a woman were screaming at one another and throwing things.

They could not hear one another, but I could.

I wasn’t in the fight, and suddenly as I listened and prayed for them,

I got the point: ears have to be restored for violence to end.

Foregoing force includes not making threats.

If we do not get the revelation of divine love and are not attracted to it,
there will be no threats of terror or punishment.

If you do not get the revelation of divine love and are not attracted to it,
you will not be judged slow or inadequate or dismissed as unloved or unwanted.

There are no winners and losers in the spiritual realm or in the eyes of God.

Foregoing force is an awesome decision.
It did not work with Pilot who could not hear the voice of Jesus
and dismissed it briskly: "What is Truth?" he sneers.
At that moment the conversation ends.
Every time the conversation ends, there is darkness and sadness.
We must learn the very real difference between discussion and conversation.
There is too much similarity between discussion and percussion or concussion.
In a discussion ideas and sometimes people are batted around
and some are accepted some are dismissed.
However with conversation there is a free flowing of meaning
shared by all involved. People come to a revelation of truth together.
Conversation which leads to conversion was preferred by Jesus
who set aside force for the sake of truth.

This is the mystery of God revealed.
A God who does not force, threaten, exclude, nor punish.
The God revealed in Jesus the Word Made Flesh
is God who wants to continue the conversation planned at the beginning.
Human freedom is essential to that plan and to that conversation.
When that human freedom is not capable of responding affirmatively,
divine love continues the conversation.
Christ is not king because he can bend human will with his might
or force us by power to submit to the Father's will.
Christ is king because out of love he foregoes force
and continues to talk.
Peter may cut off ears. Jesus restores them.
Near his death, Jesus has a royal robe of power stripped away,
and the more I ponder that crucifix before which we gather again and again,
I see him in his finest robe: a towel
which he himself chose and wrapped around himself
refusing power and force choosing instead service and sacrifice.

Those who hope to rise from the dead and live forever
shall certainly do the same, because they know that the day will come
when the question will be asked of us all: "What have you done?"

Audio Available

273

1st Sunday of Advent

12/3/2006

Jeremiah 33:14-16 + 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 + Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Fr. Boyer

What Jesus says to his disciples in the midst of this assembly is that creation is falling apart, that Genesis is being reversed.

The lamps God hung in the sky are going out.

The seas he calmed and from which he brought forth dry land upon which we could stand are seething and roaring.

The primordial chaos is returning.

But Jeremiah says to us that God keeps promises.

So, what about the Noah Promise and that Rainbow?

For those who hear the word of God and believe, the Rainbow is the Son of Man, the Full Human Being who comes when everything falls apart.

In the midst of wild chaos, He is the one who does not bend.

Surviving collapse depends on knowing where to stand.

People in earthquake areas know better than to run outside when the earth shakes. They stand in an inside doorway.

People who survive floods get to higher ground.

What Jesus speaks of today is the inevitability of breakdown and collapse, chaos and disorder. He uses cosmic images to speak not of the end of time, but of how His disciples shall stand firm when things fall apart.

Some would hear this gospel and think He speaks of the end of the space/time world, and they buy binoculars to catch the first glimpse of the cloud-riding Son of Man.

Some would hear this gospel and think He speaks of political anarchy, the breakdown of social order. Those refuges among us know how this world can fall apart.

Some would hear this gospel and think he speaks of an individual death, and the vulnerability of the physical body.

Others would hear this gospel and think he speaks of the end of a relationship, the breakup of a home, the collapse of a way of life dreamed of for a life time.

However we hear it, the point remains: things fall apart.

How disciples of Jesus experience

the unavoidable collapse of things is what He teaches us.

There is a way of seeing things and ourselves that recognizes that some things change, collapse, fall apart, and die, and some things are changelessly absolute.

Knowing the difference, and developing within oneself that which is changelessly absolute is the very essence of a Spiritual Life.

This Advent Season can be about that development or enrichment if we choose to make it so.

There is a threefold work of Advent

Remember, Repent, and Rehearse.

We must remember our past,
where we have come from and who we are because of it.

We must place ourselves realistically in the whole picture of creation.

It makes one humble and restores our focus on the divine reason for which we are here.

We must remember that birth and rebirth of God on earth are the most important moments in all of history.

We must repent not out of fear, but out of love.

Fear-repentance never lasts.

When the danger is gone, we relapse until the next scare.

People flocked to John the Baptist and fire and brimstone threats, but when they got over their fear, they went right back to their old ways until Jesus came along.

The purpose of repentance is not simply to stop sin,

but to be good. The purpose of repentance is not just to be good, but to be loving. This might even lead us to realize that the coming of Jesus was to free us from fear of God so we could be free to love God.

We must also rehearse. We remember our past, we repent to sustain the present, and we rehearse for the sake of what is to come. The wife of Lot was punished for looking back. I prefer to think she was punished for not looking ahead.

This advent way of life is both simple and profound. It does not require unusual behavior on our part, but it calls us to live the usual unusually well. It affects the everyday events of life; it directs the way we interact with people; it informs the attitudes that color our judgments and motivations.

It is as ordinary as the birth of a child; and as extraordinary as the revelation of God.

Audio Available

274

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2006

12:00 PM

Genesis 3:9-15, 20 + Ephesians 1:3-6, 11, 2 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr. Boyer

No one has ever asked me to reassign the scriptures
we proclaim for Feasts and Seasons,
but if they do, I'm going right to this day and strike the Gospel text, saving it for another occasion.
First: because it contributes to confusion about what this feast celebrates.
Second: because it is repeated on plenty of other feasts.
Now, I am not certain what I might choose to replace it,
but I can wait till they ask me to work on that.

The point here is to explore what it means "to be without sin",
and I am not sure we get that point very universally.
The consequence of not getting that point is that
Mary Immaculate become Mary the Distant,
Mary the so perfect forget about trying to imitate her,
or Mary the pure who has nothing in common with us.
When we get to that point, it's a tragedy which neither the church
nor Mary herself could accept.
The point is: what does it mean to be without sin?

We can't imagine, let alone desire to be without sin if we do not
continue to consider what it is and face its consequences.
As both a repentant sinner and a confessor, I can assure you,
identifying sin, naming it, and avoiding it is serious, tough business.
It has little if anything to do for that matter
with little spots or big spots on our soul.
It trivializes the greatness of being without sin
to think it means she didn't gossip, use bad language in traffic,
cheat on a test, tell a lie, or skip her night prayers because she was tired.

Genesis gives some good thinking about this matter
and a good clue when it describes Adam and Eve in their sin.
They hid from God!
They turned away from God preferring earthly things to the divine.
They talked to a snake: preferring that conversation
to conversation with God.
That and its consequences is what sin is all about,
and we are invited to consider on this Feast
why we have not and do not choose to be more like our mother,
for that is exactly how we are invited to see her
by putting the image of Eve,
mother of mankind before us in the first reading.
There is a new Eve now:
a new mother of a race that is called to sinlessness.

She is not to be put on such a distant pedestal with such perfections that we are hopeless to think we might imitate her.

Her gift is that she was open to God in all things and at all times.

Her sinlessness is found in her willingness to change her plans, to embrace the uncertain, to suffer fear, the doubt, the confusion of seeking the Will of God above her own will.

For her being sinless means she was never closed to God.

She never turned away from God nor led anyone else to do so.

She did not hide from God, blame anyone, nor refuse anything God asked of her. That is sinlessness.

Put simply, Sin is what gets between us and God.

Laziness, Self-indulgence, Greed, Sex, Pride, all that stuff.

If it gets between us and God, it's sin.

But she did not turn away from God or let anything else get between her and God. That is sinlessness.

This is not impossible: being without sin.

because we too are full of grace,

redeemed, and purified by the Blood of the Lamb.

Without sin, we do not hide.

Without sin, we can be filled with the Spirit.

Without sin, we receive gifts and wonder first how to use them for the glory of God and for others without wondering how to keep them.

Without sin, the Word of God is conceived in us and all creation so that every human life is sacred.

This feast invites us to imagine what it means to be without sin and so discover what it is that has come between us and God.

Audio Available

275

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2006

7:00 PM

Genesis 3:9-15, 20 + Ephesians 1:3-6, 11, 2 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

276

2nd Sunday of Advent

12/10/2006

Baruch 5: 1-9 + Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11 + Luke 3: 1-6

Fr. Boyer

All those really important people:

Caesar, The Governor of Judea, Tetrarchs and High Priests!

And where does the Word of God go?

By-passing all the seats of power and influence,

ignoring the high holy ones with their religious influence and power,
the Word of God goes straight to the desert

to an insignificant wild man who is living on the fringe of society
and holds no claim to any authority, influence, or power.

The reversal of things predicted by Baruch goes on.

Perhaps it was not so much a prediction of some future event,
but a commentary on the way things are.

Some of the powerful in Washington know how quickly things change.

Opinion polls plummet for a president,

A powerful Roman Catholic Cardinal is driven from his post,

Celebrity athletes shamed from the spotlight by revelations of drug enhancing performances,

"Enron" the symbol of prominence, power, and influence collapses in a shameful revelation of greed
and lies.

Who needs Baruch or Jeremiah?

But these ancient prophets speak both ways:

about the mighty who will fall,

and about the lowly who will rise.

This is important to remember in Advent.

Things change, and when they do, God will be found at work in the middle of it by those who remember.

The Greek word for change or repentance is "metanoia."

It literally means, "Going beyond the mind."

When we can go beyond the mind, forgiveness of sins follows.

Behind this idea is something we all know to be very real.

There is something about the mind that holds onto sin.

I can't count the times I have heard people say to me: "Father I wish I could forget it, or just forgiven
them."

Sinful experience sticks to us like super glue.

We remember the beatings, humiliations, hateful glances, mocking words, insults. When we can't even
remember our own phone number, we can remember as if it was yesterday, a hurt from twenty years
ago.

The experience of sin begins with being sinned against, and we are quick learners. We learn all too soon
how to hurt others. We call it "protecting ourselves" sometimes; but it is little more than just advancing
and promoting oneself at all costs.

If the truth is told, we have been hurt, wronged, and maltreated.

If the truth is told, we have done the same to others.

Our problem comes when the mind enthrones this experience and we begin to believe that we are helpless sinners, victims, and justified by an ever deepening connection between who we are and what had been done to us and what we have done.

Our identification with sin is a roadblock, a mountain in the way that makes slow going, not for us, but for Christ Jesus who comes. He can't get to us with his message that we are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and blessed if we continue to cling to our sin and our identity as sinners. He becomes then, not the one who is to come, but the one sin keeps away.

This is what John comes to address – “Let Go of Sin.” he says.

Repentance is subtle but not impossible.

Two steps to get there:

One, recognize the truth; we have been hurt and that we hurt others.

Two, understand the basic core belief of the Christian tradition:

the unconditional forgiveness of God.

If God can and does let it go, then what's the point of our holding on?

The question changes from: “Will God forgive me?”

to “How can I get beyond a mind that clings to sin when God does not?”

Before we can hear the words that Jesus heard at his Baptism:

“You are my beloved.” We must undergo the baptism of John:

a baptism of repentance that leads to forgiveness of sins.

When we do, the path is clear, and we will understand that this season is truly about waiting; but not about us waiting for God to come.

It is about God waiting for us to put down sins already forgiven.

Audio Available

277

3rd Sunday in Advent

12/17/2006

Zephaniah 3: 14-18 + Philippians 4: 4-7 + Luke 3: 10-18

Fr. Boyer

What should we do?

is the question this crowd asks after the Baptist's sermon. What should we do?

This is the question that forms the heart of Luke's Gospel the Gospel we shall proclaim from now until next Advent.

I've asked that question many times in my life, and I'm certain that you have too; and sometimes I've gotten an answer that left me ready to say: "Yeah, well thanks, forget that. "Sorry I asked." I suspect that some of those people who asked John what to do felt like it was a mistake to have asked.

Holding on to that second coat, that extra bread or old sandals and wondering: "What is enough?" goes through every mind that hears his response. Do I risk my own comfort for someone who has not worked as hard as I have? Can the tax collector who has had his thumb on the scale really live with a cut-back in revenue? Those soldiers he's talking to: do they really stop pushing people around? They are not out in that miserable desert to teach dancing. Their pay is meant to be supplemented by this bullying behavior, this extortion.

Any change in behavior always leads to a discovery of inner obstacles. On Advent's Third Sunday, John the Baptist calls for a change: Repentance! His advice is really a journey of self-discovery. You really get to know yourself when you start to make a change. Luke gives us John's suggestions, and with them we might learn a great deal about ourselves and expose the obstacles that keep us from God. Put simply what John says is: Share what you have; Avoid greed; and use your power well. We all have more than we need, and the moment we hesitate to share that wealth, we've uncovered an obstacle. This is a proposal to imitate God.

God shared all of creation with us, and as if that was not enough, he shared his only Son: not a spare, not an extra, not the one least loved, but his only son. "No greed." says John. When we confront the greed of our lives, we find out exactly what is in the way between us and God. When God made a covenant with us, as recorded in the First Testament, he asked us to return one tenth of what we earn: a dime out of a dollar. Not the whole thing, not even half, just a tithe: right off the top. The first fruits he called it. When we fail to do that, we act as though everything depends upon us.

It denies that we are dependent on God and on one another. That exaggerated individualism leads to greed, war, and abuse.

"Use your power well." says John. Don't force, invite. It's another imitation of God, a divine quality in us there since we were created with free will. God does not force. God invites.

I have wondered for many years what John the Baptist must have thought about this one who was to come. I honestly think he may well have been very disappointed, especially when he was sitting in Herod's prison. Where was that all – powerful one he waited for his whole life? When you listen to what John said and how he said it, you can't help but think he was surprised by Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus never came with thundering curses and threats of judgment. In stead of threats to powers like Herod, he preached to the poor.

He promised liberty to captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed.

His first contact with tax collectors was to have dinner with them. His way of bringing people to God was

different than John's,
and herein lies the cause of our Joy:
that love is what the repentant will receive,
not judgment or condemnation.

The Joyful are always in repentance, free, generous without question or limit. They are always returning to God what God asks only to be surprised by the fact that God will not be outdone. This is the rehearsal part of Advent's work: the Joy of Christmas cannot be contained. It breaks out in the middle of Advent, and the giving is not seasonal. It is a way of life.

No Audio Available

278
3rd Sunday in Advent
12/17/2006
9:00 AM

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

279

Christmas

12/25/2006

Isaiah 9: 1-6 + Titus 2:11-4 + Luke 2: 1-14

Fr. Boyer

In the lean and simple language of Luke,
we take delight again in the ageless story which begins
in the most humble setting, with the least likely people.
The story tells of boundaries broken and creation restored.
It proclaims as John's Gospel puts it, that the Word is Made Flesh.
In English, five words so powerful and significant
That today when we proclaim them in the Creed, we are instructed
by the ritual to put our knee on the floor: to genuflect.

Already in Luke's telling of this new Genesis,
two figures have emerged
who tell us what happens when the Word takes flesh.
Elizabeth and Mary are the first to experience this new creation,
but they are not the last.
Elizabeth the barren, and Mary the Virgin have both had an encounter with the creative power of God's
Word.
She who was counted as nothing, discarded as useless and old
without even an identity in Israel because she could not bear a son
to continue the race is suddenly redeemed and made whole by this wonder.
And a young girl from no-where, out of the main stream of life,
from out in the hill country is called highly favored and chosen.
The boundaries are broken.
Heaven and earth get mixed up together.
The Divine and the Human mingle in flesh and blood
breath and spirit, dream and hope, and the future becomes the present.

Words have the power to change the course of human events.
"Be it done to me according to your word." said Mary.
Because of that willingness to say "Yes" to the Word, the course of human events changed forever. And
it still does.
"Is it your wish that we Baptize this child?" parents are asked at that font.
They say: "Yes." and that child is changed forever.
"Will you marry me?" one says to another, and those people are changed forever.
"Will you love and honor each other for the rest of your lives?" the priest or deacon asks, and nothing is
ever the same.
There is such power in Words.
They can sting and kill, and they can give life and joy, peace and hope.
Words of kindness to a stranger can bring joy.
Words of comfort can bring hope.
Words of forgiveness can bring peace between enemies.
We assemble here because a Word has been spoken.

So once again we retell the story of the Word
which when spoken in Genesis made all things good.
Once again we retell the story of the Word
which when spoken restores that good creation
with its promise that human life and God have once and for all
been bound together as they were meant to be from the beginning.
It means that our future and our growth are in God's own hands.

We need not wonder where our life is taking us.
The peace, the joy, the satisfaction of Isaiah's vision is what lies ahead.
Whatever burdens we may bear now,
whatever we may have suffered in the past,
whatever we may have yet to endure,
is really not important.
Whatever our burdens may be, they are uncomfortable and inconvenient, but that is all they are.
They do not last, and they do not keep us from the promise.

What happened to Elizabeth and to Mary
is happening to everyone who will listen and say, "yes."
This world is now a holy place, a sacred place because what we proclaim today is that God has come to
dwell here,
and so we are a holy people living in a sacred world.
The only evil here is a refusal to honor and recognize that holiness.
This is not a birthday party. It is an invasion. It is an interruption of a "business as usual" world by the
divine insistence
that we live up to what we were made and called to be.
Why? Because God loves us.
This no sentimental love that fits into a thirty-minute TV special,
but a terrifying divine love that is literally ready to turn the world inside out to rescue and restore us.
We are not spectators in this divine plan.
This is not just about the birth of Christ.
It is about our birth into life everlasting

Audio Available

280
4th Sunday in Advent
12/24/2006
9:00 AM

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

281

Holy Family

12/31/2006

1 Samuel 1:1-28 + Colossians 3:12-21 + Luke 2:41-52

Fr, Boyer

She was desperate.

Her self esteem was lower than low.

She was ridiculed by others.

She looked so bad in her sadness that some thought she was a drunk. She had everything a young woman could dream of.

She was cherished by a loving husband who treated her like a queen.

Yet she was still miserable.

Ungodly people prospered and gloated over their prosperity.

While she who was faithful to her God struggled against adversity and disappointments that made her feel like a failure.

For years she has tried everything, including prayer with no results.

This woman, thought by others to be a failure and useless, near the end of her hope, had said every prayer in the book.

Not until all her efforts failed does she come to God without words, simply with her heart.

Finally, the book says; "She prayed with her heart", and God who knows what is in our hearts hears and responds.

She is a woman of prayer, of faithfulness, of dignity, and perseverance.

She is generous with God because she knows God has been generous with her.

Her name is Hannah, and her story opens our liturgy today where she shines in the Bible's galaxy of saints.

Hannah is not just a model for women, wives, and mothers.

Her story speaks to everyone who knows anxiety and depression, disappointment and failure.

The effectiveness of her prayer is not found in using the right words, but in having the right heart.

She has a heart of faith and a heart of trust.

Because of that faith and courage the unfolding of salvation history is possible.

She does not keep for herself what God gives her.

Struck by the goodness and generosity of God toward her; she returns to God what was given by God; and she gets more in return.

She wanted a son desperately.

When God finally granted her faithful and patient prayer, she returned that son, Samuel, to the Lord.

He was a child of destiny who as chief priest and prophet would bridge the era between Judges and Kings

It is Samuel who heard the call of God and spent his life communicating the Word of God to the people.
He is the one who chose David, the least likely son of another family to anoint as King, Prophet, Leader, and Teacher.

Even children of destiny have parents,
and Hannah's story even while set in a cultic and archaic culture foreign to us is fresh and new and real.
Unable to help herself, she came to God with a faithful heart.
Generous with the God who was generous to her,
she was even more blessed,
for after giving her son to the temple and God,
it is recorded that she gave birth to three sons and two daughters.

This is the story the church puts before us on the Sunday after Christmas.
To a people who have more than they need yet still feel uneasy; comes Hannah's story.
To a people who feel like failure, who wait and long for the one gift that will give life meaning and purpose, comes Hannah's story.
On the eve of a New Year, Hannah lifts our spirits with hope and promise, and confirms what we believe.
While some who turn from God to goods seem to prosper; those who wait, who hope, who trust, and who pray with a sincere heart are never abandoned by God.
And what's more, those who are generous with God receive more than they ask for.

Audio Available

282

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

1/1/2007

Numbers 6: 22-27 + Psalm 8 + Galatians 4:4-7 + Luke 2: 15-21

Fr. Boyer

So often the Motherhood of Mary gets lost in all the other dogmas and theological issues rooted in our Christian tradition of Mariology.

Annunciations, Assumptions, Coronations, Conceptions

all center around one essential reality, motherhood.

Even in Koran Islam recognizes this motherhood.

Mary is mentioned there by name

more often than in the New Testament.

I suppose it's because it seems so common and ordinary

that the great minds of the church

find it more challenging to explore all those other things.

Personally, the older I get,

and the more wisdom I gain from life and relationships

leads me to think this is the premier feast of Mary.

Recent theology entertains the idea that Mary is the ideal disciple of Jesus as one who hears God's word and acts upon it while treasuring God's mysteries in her heart.

But that recent theology also ought to entertain the idea

that before she became the ideal disciple of Jesus, he learned from her.

She nurtured and taught him the traditions of his people

and guided him through childhood to maturity.

She presented him to the Lord in fulfillment of the Law.

She took him to the temple where he is first revealed as "Teacher".

As such, she stands in our tradition first as Mother and model

of that exalted vocation: "Motherhood."

It's not then about car seats, diapers, baby food, and soccer.

Motherhood is about leading, teaching, and planting seeds of faith.

For us all, men and women, she becomes the inspiration of contemplation and reflection.

She inspires us to consider deeply the significance of events

rather than live a bland and shallow life.

What Luke suggests is that she stood before life

as a participant, not a victim.

When things happened she did not understand,

she could never have stood back and shook her head and wondered, "Why?".

She would have looked at things and wondered, "What does it mean?" and then "What am I going to become because of it."

This is the way people formed in the deepest tradition of our faith

stand before tragedy and pain.

They see violence but do not become violent.

They experience loss and tragedy but do not become bitter and angry,

because they ponder these things in their hearts

asking the right questions:

“What does this mean?” and “What shall I become because of it?”
A life by this model is not shallow or easily upset.

Mary inspires us to constant reflection on the truths of our faith,
which continue to be made real in life’s experience.
She inspires us to fidelity in practicing our faith,
practices that are disciplines of soul that lead a community
to a clear focus on the presence of God in human affairs.

And so, on this first day of the new calendar year,
we can hardly do better than gather in this holy place
and invoke the memory of one whose life in human history
ushered in a new age.
The message of the Church this day
is that new beginnings are always possible.
We are never condemned to repeat over and over again
our past failures or past weaknesses.
This is the hope that faith stirs in us for the days to come,
and in that hope our Joy is sustained.

Long ago Saint Ambrose stood in the Cathedral of Milan
and said this to the assembly:
“Let Mary’s soul be in each of you to proclaim the greatness of the Lord. Let her spirit be in each to
rejoice in the Lord. Christ has only one mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith.”
My dear friends, one week ago at this hour,
the Christmas Feast was still being celebrated in the day.
Today we may pray in gratitude for God-bearing women
and we reflect that they, too, have conceived Christ in their hearts
and are called to bring him forth to a suffering world longing for peace.

Audio Available

283

Epiphany of the Lord

1/7/2007

Isaiah 60: 1-6 + Psalm 72 + Ephesians 3: 2-6 + Matthew 2: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

About twenty years ago, I was named pastor of the Cathedral in central Oklahoma City where there was a sizeable number of Vietnamese people in membership. As my first Christmas drew near, I learned that Christmas Eve afternoon had become a huge cultural event for that Asian Catholic Community culminating with a great pageant in the Cathedral.

At the appointed time, with the 700 seat Cathedral crammed with more than one thousand people; a grand procession weaved its way unsteadily through the center aisle.

There were the usual angels with wire wings, children in wooly sheep heads and ears that looked more like rabbits than lambs, ragged shepherds, and elaborate kings being led by a giant camel that towered over the heads of the assembly.

It was large contraption covered with tan colored cloth.

You knew it was a camel because of the head being held aloft on a long pole.

About half way down the aisle, the pole dipped just a bit, then shook a little, and the head fell off and rolled under a pew.

It took several minutes to fish the camel's head out from between the legs in the crowded pew and restore order.

In the meantime, angels, lambs, and an errant donkey reached the sanctuary without guidance of the star that was shaking precariously over the scenery erected in front of the altar.

I sat in my pew profoundly struck by the fact that way out here in the middle of this vast country these refugees were telling this story with its profoundly political and social themes.

They understood homelessness, and when they told a story of a couple looking for room in a foreign place, of a family fleeing from a violent political regime, they knew what they were talking about.

Since that experience and my fifteen years of living in that community, I have lost that romantic patina that hides the real message and reality of the infancy narrative in the Gospels.

I think because it's just a little too much reality, an important feast slips past in the church calendar between Christmas and today. It is never celebrated on Sunday, and that's too bad. It is the feast called: "The Holy Innocents". It is a sobering interlude in the twelve days of Christmas that provides a serious reminder

that there was and still is a big political cost to the Incarnation.

It is a sharp contrast to the sentimentalized visions of Christmas that artists, poets, and musicians have provided through the ages.

When you remember the story of the Holy Innocents which Matthew preserves for us, you get the connection between Moses and Jesus.

Both births were threats to a paranoid potentate. Imagine! The birth of an infant was a challenge to both Pharaoh and Herod unleashing a rein of terror and infanticide all justified by national security.

But the best laid royal plans fail because of their accomplices:

Hebrew midwives who put infant Moses in a basket, and some strangers from out of town who deceive Herod

in order to chose life.

The costly courage of their conscience shapes the whole drama.

Hidden in these stories is the truth of what happens when people of courage seize an opportunity to do something rather than nothing.

Epiphany is really a story of resistance to imperial violence.

We must remember the whole story from beginning to end.

The consequence of this visit was a rampage of violence that left mothers screaming over dead children.

We can still hear them in real life.

Our world still teems with refugees, wailing mothers, and murderous foreign polices on every continent.

Epiphany is a political event through which the gospel of life challenges a culture and an empire of death.

Epiphany is a story of resistance by people of conscience

told to give us courage and hope at a time of imperial discontent.

The Bible has seen and recorded this period of time before and it assures us that God is with us.

It tells a story of God sneaking into our history out of sight like a thief in the night.

The light still sneaks into the darkness of this world.

The issue is now is simply whether or not we shall recognize it, and then like the Magi act accordingly.

Audio Available

284

Ordinary Time 2

1/14/2007

Isaiah 62: 1-5 + Psalm 96 + 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 + John 2: 1-11

Fr. Boyer

John's Gospel is a chorus of cries that express the human condition.

Chapter after chapter voices cry out

by all who seek the presence of God.

"Come down before my little boy dies."

"I have no one to put me in the pool."

"Six months wages is not enough to feed this crowd."

"I want to see."

"Lord come, the one you love is ill."

It is a chorus of human afflictions.

It's not about evil or violence. It's about the human condition.

"They have no wine." says the woman.

This story is not about a man and a woman in Cana.

It is about the marriage of the divine and human life

which is why we proclaim it in the wake of Christmas.

In this second chapter and the very beginning of his Gospel,

John makes a statement about the very reason for Jesus' being.

He comes to supply the wine

for the imperiled marriage of the divine and the human.

The question John puts on the lips of Jesus:

"What does this have to do with me?" is easily answered.

EVERYTHING.

Our condition in this world is so jeopardized that we cannot celebrate.

We have no wine.

All we have is stuff, and it doesn't last.

All we have is guns and bombs, and it doesn't make us safe or peaceful.

All we have is enormous wealth, and it doesn't make us just.

All we have is technology and it gives us no rest.

We have no wine.

Jesus himself has entered into this condition.

He is the bridegroom of this shaky marriage come with the wine.

There is no doubt that God could have saved us from the outside,

by divine fiat or the force of divine power.

But God has chosen to save us from the inside

by sharing our human suffering.

The drinking of good wine at a wedding in Cana is only possible for him by drinking the sour wine on a cross outside Jerusalem.

This is what his "hour" is about – the moment when he has shared it all even death itself.

This is a truth that must not be forgotten.

We are saved from within, by one of our own

who shows us how to live and leads us to that life.

We must not fail to read the sign.
The servants in the story know where the wine came from.
The steward does not. He is stuck on the taste of the wine,
He stays on the surface, the physical and literal level.
For him there is no sign.
But we know where the wine came from
and so we can read the signs and come to believe.

John begins this story by telling us that this happened on the “third day.”
Does that click something within you?
Do you recall something else happening on the third day?
It is a resurrection symbol that signals a moment of revelation.
Jesus also cleansed the temple on a “third day.”
The location of this wedding also signals something: Cana is in Galilee.
Here Jesus has a favorable reception and there is a wedding.
In Jerusalem there is rejection and a funeral.

These signs prove nothing. They are not miracles to amaze us.
They are windows through which God is revealed.
To only pay attention to the miraculous and never ask,
“What does this mean?” and “What am I because of it?”
leaves us like the Wine Steward of the story;
left to simply feel curious about the unusual.

This is revelation! It tells us that the reign of God has begun!
We look through this and the other signs
to come to a reality that is deeper.
We are in a marriage,
and someone has come to make certain that the wine does not run out.
Like the marriages so many of you live day in and day out,
this marriage asks for faithfulness, total love, devotion, and sacrifice.
Here is the wedding feast.
Here there is the wine and the water at a feast and at a crucifixion.

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286

Ordinary Time 3

1/21/2007

Nehemiah 8:2-10 + Psalm 19 + 1 Corinthians 12: 12-30 + Luke 1:1-21

Fr. Boyer

The Jesus of Luke's Gospel who emerges from the shadows of his youth is a man of purpose and direction.

He knows who he is.

He knows what his life is for and what he should do with his gifts.

He is focused, consistent and clear about his life.

We never get a sense in Luke's Gospel

that he was self conscious,

doubted what God asked of him,

or what direction to take with the choices he faced.

These are not divine qualities, and they ought not be dismissed by some silly Christology that suggests that his Divine Nature made life easy for him.

These are human qualities that Luke proposes should be found in those who would be disciples of Jesus and follow him.

He shows us how to become like Jesus.

He proposes where these qualities are developed and how to nurture them.

This is part of the purpose for this Gospel event today.

Jesus of Nazareth defined himself, set his goals, and found his courage to be faithful to the mission he believed God had called him to from his faithful observance of traditions in the synagogue and his knowledge of the Word of God.

How could it possibly be different for us?

We see people all the time, and every one of us knows someone who just does not seem to "get it";

who simply can't seem to figure out who they are, where they are going in life, or what to do with their gifts, and many of them are richly blessed.

Some of them think they're here to look good, be attractive be successful in business, yet all the while they are empty and there is a nagging sense that all is not really right.

They go around in shallow circles, unsure of themselves, lonely and fearful that this might be all there is to life.

This cannot so with disciples of Jesus Christ.

They know who they are.

They know where they are headed.

They know what to do with their lives, their gifts, the opportunities that God's providence supplies.

They find all this where Jesus found it:

in the faithful observance of their religious tradition.

They are in church. They are part of that church's life
so much so that they might be called upon to do something
as Jesus was called upon to read that day.
He was no stranger there. He was not passing through.
Most of all, he knew the scriptures.
He didn't just play scriptural roulette and let the scroll fall open.
He knew exactly where to find the prophet,
and he knew a passage
that focused his life and expressed God's will for him.

I want you to leave here today
thinking about that scene with yourself in it.
If I walked down into this assembly and handed anyone of you
these scriptures, could you find a passage
that is for you an expression of God's will,
and a passage that gives your life purpose, meaning, and direction?
If not? Why not?
The desire to imitate Jesus is not just a moral imperative
that concerns doing good and showing mercy.
It must also include imitating the whole of his life
which also was about fidelity to religious tradition
and a firm knowledge of the Word of God.
This behavior on his part
was the source of his goodness as a human being.
It has been so for me, and I hope it shall be so for all of you,
especially the young among us who still are discovering who they are
and what they shall become.

Audio Available

287
Ordinary Time 4
1/28/2007

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

288

Ordinary Time 5

2/4/2007

Isaiah 6:1-8 + Psalm 138 + 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11 + Luke 5:1-11

Fr. Boyer

There is a wonderful sense of movement in today's Gospel;
and the movement carries the message.

Pay attention to the boat which starts at the shore,
then "puts out a little."

Finally it goes to the deep water.

There in deep water things happen which eventually
lead Peter and the others back to shore.

Two different groups of people receive the Word of God:
the crowd and the disciples;

those who stay on the shore, and those who get into the deep water.

The contrast and the point which Luke makes with these details
is very important.

Those who go out, who are willing to leave the shore,
those who will go into deep water experience what they have heard.

Those who stay on the shore only stand and listen.

The disciples in the boat follow the instruction of Jesus,
and the consequence of doing so is a blessing of abundance.

This experience does not happen for those who stay in the shallows
or choose the security of the shore.

What we see happening is that those in the boat
realize a life-changing, life transforming experience.

They have done more than just listen to the Word spoken to them.

They have let go of the shallows of life for the sake of the deep.

Isaiah, Paul, and Disciples are in today's readings all called by God.

But these calls are not calls to faith, they are calls to ministry.

We are not called simply to life of personal holiness
however important that may be.

We are, at least those who get in the boat and push away from the shore, called by God to be sent into
this world.

In the Gospel, Simon Peter is sent to "catch".

Now think of that image for a moment.

"Catch" in the sense of fishing means to snatch up.

In the sense of the Gospel, it means to snatch up from death.

We must catch the fallen, hold up the stumbling.

In more practical ways in this day and time,
it means we might insist on fair practices at work,
weed out prejudice and violence

so that a new a just world may can be fashioned.

In other words, we are told by Jesus to "catch"

those who are falling through the net of life,

those who are struck down by prejudice and injustice.

There is here a challenge to the shallowness of too many who call themselves Christians, but stand on the shore. There is an opportunity, a call to put out into the deep, to risk such a change in life that we might get out into the open water. It seems to be the only place where fullness and abundance are found. Once that risk is taken, once that fullness is found, leaving everything is easy, and putting one's feet on the path with Christ Jesus is the only way to go in this life.

So many times in life we think and say: "I can't do it." and just as many times in Scripture God's response is: "Of course you can't. Nobody can, but I can." The disproportion between our abilities and what we are asked to accomplish in our roles is far greater even than the disproportion between Peter's ability as a fisherman and the catch he finally makes. What God asks of us is that we put out from the shore. What God asks of us is openness to truth, a willingness to learn, readiness to grow, a sense of responsibility and a generous spirit.

They caught nothing after a long night of fishing for themselves. In the company of Jesus, they do it again, and this time it's more than they bargained for. Suddenly it's the fishermen who get caught; caught by Jesus, caught and called called from fear to humility, to trust, and to service. It won't happen on the shore however, you have to get out into the deep.

Audio Available

289

Ordinary Time 6

2/11/2007

Jeremiah 17: 5-8 + Psalm 1 + 1 Corinthians 15: 12, 16-20 + Luke 6:20-26

Fr. Boyer

There is a great risk of “spiritualizing” these words of Jesus that is often a way of insulating ourselves from their literal meaning.

To get the message here, we must pay attention to both.

That “the poor” exist as a social class, marginalized and powerless is itself part of the message.

It should not be so. They should not be poor.

Their very existence is an indictment those who leave them poor.

Those allow the poverty to continue will not enjoy the consolation of the Kingdom.

If there are hungry people, there is something wrong with the well fed.

If someone is weeping, there is something wrong with those who gave them reason to weep.

If someone is hated, this Gospel suggests that there is something wrong with the one who does the hating.

The wealth of this world and its pleasures are not the blessings we might think they are. In truth, the wealth we enjoy and its pleasures are a challenge, a burden, and a responsibility. Provoking our reflection is the purpose of the paradox Luke puts before us today.

There is a popular television preacher these days who proclaims that God wants us to be rich. This preacher says “NO” to that. God wants us to be Holy, and the only rich holy people (Saints) I know of became holy because they cared more about injustice than about their wealth.

This Gospel cannot be spiritualized into silence. Luke, whose community historically must have embraced many wealthy people in its time, speaks to the rich the good news that their salvation lies in concern for the poor and in using their goods for others. This message in our day carries not only to individuals, but to corporations as well, since the whole idea of a “corporation” implies the collective people who give the system identity and power.

Jesus has been up on the mountain alone with God. There in prayer, he must have attuned himself to the mind or will of God. Coming down from there into our midst, he reveals God’s vision for human life

in contrast to the way humans are really living it.
It is this discrepancy that drives the blessings and woes.
Out of sync with God, this world's judgments are off the mark.
Success or failure, happiness or despair as this world sees it
is not normative nor lasting,
because it is too far from the Will of God.
"Real Life" is constructed upon the rock of spiritual truth
and it takes seriously the Word of God
as normative for how we live now and every day.

Timothy in his Epistle spells it out best of all.

"For those who in the present age are rich, command them not be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life."

No Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 7

2/18/2007

1 Samuel 26:2, -9,12-13,22-23 + Psalm 103 + 1 Corinthians 15: 45-49 + Luke 6:27-38

Fr. Boyer

This Gospel will thin the ranks of disciples.

It goes against common sense.

Doing good to those who hate you is codependency at its best.

It is masochism at worst.

Giving to everyone who begs will eventually mean that you'll be begging and find out that most people don't give to those who beg.

In the end, you begin to wonder if Jesus skipped Playground 101?

What happened to that God

who was going to make my enemies my foot stool?

Where is the God of Moses and Elijah who slaughtered enemies?

What we are hearing today is a parody on that saying:

"Do unto others before they do unto you."

Jesus has seen the never ending nature of violence
and the never ending nature of God.

The two are incompatible.

Our relationship to that God of love must be stronger
than our relationship to anything else,
and eventually we will have to make a choice.

They are incompatible.

In other words: circumstances do not control us.

Enemies, persecutors, haters do not make us into themselves
infecting us with their toxicity, but that is always their power.
They make returning evil seem necessary, a matter of survival.

In that thinking, we always say:

"We didn't start it, but we can end it!"

No we can't. It has never been so.

We always have the option to choose
between a reaction and a response.

The difference between the two is only a matter of a pause.

There is no pause before a reaction. It is simply knee-jerk and mindless.

After a pause however, there can be a response
that is mindful and more in touch with who we really are.

In the choice between reaction and response lies growth and happiness.

Our ability to take that pause - to stand in the space of time
is the measure of our spiritual development.

We make a choice in that space between
slavery to compulsive reaction or liberation from reactivity.

The truth here is simple:

our personal actions create the world in which we live.
When we get bone-dead honest with ourselves,
we know the connection
between how we act toward others and our own destiny.
If we are judgmental and condemning of others,
we end up swallowed in negative fury.
When we are fiercely righteous, we never see it,
but our own inner state of self condemnation targets others
while it really brings us to judgment.
What we think is harmful to others is really harmful to us.

It also works in reverse.
The way of forgiveness in Jesus may first seem to benefit others,
but it is ultimately our way to fulfillment and freedom.
The generosity we bestow on others always overflows into our lives.
We find ourselves, so often the recipient of our own generosity.
How we treat others becomes how we are treated.

This truth is not put before us as an article of belief.
We are not asked today to say "Yes"
because this is the inspired word of God,
but because if we look deeply enough
what is revealed here is human experience
illuminated by the Word of God.
It takes a little practice,
but in time we realize that what Jesus proposes is really the truth,
and as Flannery O'Connor said: "The truth will make us odd."

It takes a little practice to enjoy that pause and be comfortable
in choosing a response rooted in our true identity
rather than be trapped in one reaction after another.

Audio Available

291

Funeral for Malcolm Morris

2/19/2007

Jeremiah 17:5-8 + 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20 + John 15:10-17

Fr. Boyer

The stage is dark and bare as the lights come up.

A jangly piano tune kicks into gear, and then the orchestra.

Suddenly the stage is awl with young dancers leaping and flailing about.

A snappish director is shouting commands at them:

“Turn, turn, touch, down, back, step, pivot.....”

There is so much going on, the eye can't follow it all;

but just a few seconds of this you begin to notice that each of the dancers

has something of their own style, and suddenly a young dancer steps up stage

and asks a question that will hover in the background for the rest of the show:

“Who am I anyway? Am I my resume?”

The show is “A Chorus Line”. It chronicles the personal histories

of actual dancers, and won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in the 70s.

The setting is simply an audition,

but it's much, much more as it digs into a person's battle

to define their life and achieve success.

In an age that is fascinated with shows like “American Idol”

that is captivated by Donald Trumpp's judgments and pronouncements,

that is teased into fantasy by “Reality shows” that are anything but “real”;

the haunting question of a dancer named Paul gives us a clue

with which to address our grief and focus our thoughts today

because we are all more than the sum of our experiences

and so was Malcolm Morris.

I sat with Dottie late last week and she handed me a draft of an obituary.

I read it and handed it back with a shrug that matched the look on her face.

We didn't say so in words, but we were thinking the same thing:

“Is that all?” or, to echo the question that opens A Chorus Line:

“Who am I anyway? Am I my resume?”

The question raises a fundamental issue

that Jesus puts before us again and again:

are we here to DO or to BE?

Is our life about doing things or about becoming someone or something?

For more than twenty-five years, I sat like most you

listening to that man's hands caress a keyboard.

What I recognized and always marveled at

was his ability to take a simple line of melody and leave it alone,

and then suddenly put the most brilliant display

of diminished and augmented chords beneath it.

Now for non musicians, “diminished” and “augmented” chords

usually have just one or two extra notes that just tilt the sound a tiny bit

just enough to add some passion, some warmth, some color to the sound.
I've also noticed that when you have a lot of augmented and diminished chords,
you want to get up and dance even if you don't know how.

We give thanks and celebrate before our God today
because all our lives have had a fist full of diminished and augmented chords
added to them by our friend, Sandy's father, and Dottie's husband and companion.
As a result, I have this silly notion that the choirs of angels
we have so often imagined with the help of artists and romanticists
are suddenly doing more than singing Holy Holy Holy.
Perhaps with a few augmented chords, they have picked up a lyric from A Chorus Line.
"Kiss today goodbye. Point me toward tomorrow.
"Won't forget, can't regret. What I did for love."

Near the end of his life as John the Evangelist tells the story,
Jesus puts down all the things he has done
and reveals what he has become.
He has done the work of a healer.
He has done the work of a provider.
He has done the work of a teacher/rabbi.
He has done all that every good Jewish man should do.
He has done the Father's Will.
He has been a good steward of his gifts.
Now, near the end, what matters is not what he has done,
but what he has become in doing all those things so well:
a friend and companion to us all, and the "Son of God."

In the life we honor today we have seen the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy:
"Blessed is one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord.
He is like a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches its roots to the stream:
It fears not the heat when it comes;
its leaves stay green;
in the year of draught it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.

Near the end of his life, Malcolm knew the draught,
and in the heat of illness, frailty and suffering his "leaves stayed green."
Today we celebrate the best fruits of his life:
a church full of friends, a heart full of memories, and lives augmented by a smile,
by faith, by courage, integrity, and holiness.
Now at the end, what matters is not what he has done,
but what he has become in doing all things well.
a friend and companion to us all, and truly a "son of God."

Audio Available

292

Ash Wednesday

2/21/2007

Joel 2:12-18 + Psalm 51 + 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10 + Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Fr. Boyer

Islam with it's face to the ground,

Israel with covered heads.

Ashes on our faces, because we are not worthy.

Ramdan, Yom Kippur, Lent: we fast, all of us.

Financial Sacrifice for the sake of others

because God expects it from everyone.

The mood this day, the spirit of this occasion for all of us

is not a matter of convenience or how we feel.

We are not "invited" to pray, to fast, to give.

It is command. It is what we do because of who we are.

Yet this is not the sort of talk we like.

This age, and this western culture in which we find ourselves believes

that convenience trumps all;

that freedom means choice;

that if it doesn't feel good, we don't do it,

and that if we don't get something, we're not about to give.

The prophet says, NO to that thinking.

The "Lord" in this reading doesn't say: "Could I please have your attention?" or "Would you mind looking this way?"

He says: "Return to me." It means: "Get over here."

"And while you're at it, Get on your knees. Get hungry, and do something for someone who can't do anything for you."

There is nothing soft or easy about what God expects of us,
and this season simplifies the message.

The mercy of God is useless

to those who have not repented and asked for it.

The kindness of God is not available

to those who know nothing of kindness.

The generosity of God is not going to be experienced

by those who are not generous.

This day and the season it begins is about rediscovering
the image in which we have been created.

We have forty days to figure out how much we resemble God;

God as we have experienced Him in human form: Christ Jesus.

We shall in the weeks to come explore in depth that human form of God.

And if we have prayed like him, fasted like him, and given like him,

we shall first of all be able to resist temptation

as we shall soon hear this Sunday.

And finally when the forty days of our lives are complete,
we shall rise like him from the dead.
Until then we shall wear the mark of death
but only as an exterior sign of something going on inside.
Within, we shall pray more than ever.
Our prayer shall be for mercy, and we shall seek forgiveness in a public way which is just what the
Sacrament of Penance is all about.
If you think you can just handle it privately between you and God,
then why not just make your own Ashes?
There is a connection between this action and confession of sins.
Mercy is not imposed. It is given to those who ask.

We shall fast, and it doesn't mean giving up chocolate.
Fasting is not a diet or a return to healthy eating.
It is a refusal. It is saying "No: to an appetite: every appetite.
By saying, "NO"; we resist temptation and sin.
That's what it's all about, learning again the meaning of "NO!"
We don't like that word in this culture,
but this culture needs to be redeemed, and it will only happen by fasting.

We shall also make and offer sacrifices,
and it doesn't mean loose change that we don't need anyway.
It means feeding someone, putting a roof over their head, or heat in their house, because we have too
much to eat, too many empty rooms and beds, and way too many coats. The bottom line is: we have no
right to these things. What we have is obligation. The freedom and the choice we have is what to do, not
whether or not we should.

These are tough words and tough things to think about.
This season is tough, is serious, and very, very real.
Forty days in a desert is tough business.
Accepting the mark of the cross is not for show.
It is for life and for salvation.

Audio Available

293

Lent 1

2/25/2007

Fr. Boyer

It's our desert time, this Lent.

Forty days to spend looking deeply and honestly into ourselves.

Or forty days of slight inconvenience caused by the loss of trivial little things we probably don't need anyway or use in excess most of the time.

The story Luke puts before is not something from a journal kept by Jesus.

No piece of history, this is the story of anyone

who might choose to spend some time wondering who they are

and what they might become

with the gifts they have discovered in themselves.

This is a story that raises the question we must all eventually ask ourselves.

Why am I doing this or that? Why have I made these choices?

The temptations of this story are not about bread from stones,

kingdoms observed from a high place,

or the need to see if God is really there for us.

The issue here faced by Jesus in that desert is identity

but when we tell it here, it is not just the identity of Jesus,

but the identity of any of us.

In that desert, Jesus had to decide

whether to exercise his power as Son of God for himself or for others.

He had to decide whether his power

would bring him riches and prestige

or simply the knowledge that he was doing God's will.

Our desert time for the next six weeks can do the same.

The gifts with which we find ourselves

are not much different from the gifts Jesus recognized in himself.

The challenge and the question proposed by this Gospel is the same.

What are we doing to do with the life we have?

What are we going to do with the gifts we find in such abundance?

Use them for ourselves? For our ambition, prestige, or power?

Behind these three temptations is a much bigger issue.

The real temptation Jesus faces here has nothing to do

with bread, kingdoms, or assurances of God's care and presence.

The real temptation for Jesus is one we face all the time.

We're not tempted to turn stone into bread,

to imagine ourselves as the leader and ruler of nations.

We are not tempted to try something silly to see if God will rescue us.

But our identity is called into question all the time.

The temptation Jesus faced in that desert

was about what he was to become:

what he understood himself to be from his Baptism?
Or what someone else (the devil) would like him to become?
Is his life and are his decisions shaped by what happened at his Baptism,
or is his life and decisions shaped
by what someone else thought of him or wanted him to be?
That's the real temptation he faced, and he faced it all the time.
Easy to become a miracle worker
having people flock around, call him by name, run out to meet him.
Miracles are cool. They're fascinating.
Why not feed all those hungry people with a miracle?
That would be a lot easier than doing it yourself!
That's the problem with this thinking.
It leaves God to the heavy lifting, so to speak.
The other problem with miracles is that it leave people passive
expecting God to do everything.

These forty days might well give us time once again
to examine why we do the things we have chosen to do;
and give us pause to consider again
who we really are by Baptism and what God wants of us,
or because of what others think of us.
This is the real temptation of life.
It is first focused on what we become, then on what we do because of it.

Audio Available

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Lent 2
3/4/2007
9:00 AM

Fr. Ackerman

Audio Available

295
Lent 3
3/11/2007

Fr. Joachim

Audio Available

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Lent 4

3/18/2007

Joshua 5: 9-12 + Psalm 34 + 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21 + Luke 15:1-31

Fr. Boyer

It is both a story of sibling rivalry and inheritance lost.

It is a story of a parent ungratefully dismissed and costly love.

Biblical stories of fighting brothers are nothing new:

Cane and Able; Ishmael and Isaac; Jacob and Esau

are all stories of brothers in conflict and the younger one coming out ahead contrary to the way things should be in that culture and society.

The opening story of the Old Testament is one of inheritance lost, and that sets the theme for all the rest....."the last shall be first....."

This parent's story is twice burdened by ungrateful children.

This father doesn't have just one ungrateful son, he has two!

When the suggestion comes up to split up the inheritance,

the one who stays home does not seem to object to his younger brother's scheme. He says nothing in protest.

He seems quite content to take his share early as well!

Right in the middle of this conflict stands the father

whose love seems to be endless.

All he wants is Joy, and it's in short supply in this story.

Weaving its way through the episodes, there is this sense of joylessness.

What spoils the joy, and ruins the day

is resentment in the face of gratitude and grace.

The older son thinks he is privileged.

He talks of rewards,

and claims the high ground with his self-congratulating attitude.

Resentment is built on comparison and perceived inequality.

The older brother evaluates himself in relation to his younger brother and, not surprisingly, comes off favorably.

He states the facts accurately:

He has obeyed, his brother has not

He has stayed home and worked, his brother squandered everything.

The game of merit does not have God as a player.

Grace does not go to those who deserve it.

Grace goes to those who can receive it.

The young son had emptied himself – everything was gone.

The older son was far from empty.

He was full of himself, his deeds, his skills,

and now with his resentment.

He is without Joy and so is everyone else.

We work for reward, and then in the presence of God's abundance,
we find ourselves resentful and envious.

This keeps us from joy.

When we break loose from the poison of privilege

and stand firm in the face of grace;

when we cease to measure our worth and expect reward

by comparing ourselves with another,

we will have come face to face with grace and in its presence,

we will see God who loves us all and would call us all His children.

That day of grace will be the beginning of gratitude,

and thanksgiving will be all we think of.

On that day, we shall hear the music in the house,

and we shall know that we are home.

Audio Available

297

Lent 5

3/25/2007

Isaiah 43:16-21 + Psalm 126 + Philippians 3:8-13 + John 8: 1-11

Fr. Boyer

Jesus is really the one on trial here.

The situation with the woman is just a game to trick Jesus and catch him in some contradiction or conflict. with the law.

The church places this scene of accusation, judgment, and condemnation on the Sunday before another scene of accusation, judgment and condemnation.

They have different outcomes, fortunately for us.

There are three verbs in this story we shall hear again:

“Caught, brought, and made to stand there”

These are verbs of power, of control, In another week, we shall hear of Jesus being caught, brought, and made to stand there.

In both stories, the power is broken

In both stories, when the end comes, there is no one left.

They, the powerful, the ones who seem to have control go away.

In both stories, the accused live, and so for all of us, these are stories of hope when the misery of sin meets the mercy of grace.

Those righteous ones who caught, brought, and made her stand there have walked away not just from Jesus, but from his teaching about forgiveness and mercy.

In their blindness and ignorance, they have bound judgment and condemnation together.

It is not so with Jesus.

The Pharisees saw the person and the sin as one and the same.

Jesus wanted to put an end to the act: “Sin no more.” he said.

The Pharisees wanted to put an end to the woman.

What Jesus teaches that day in the Temple is that right judgment about the morality of acts does not include the right to condemnation.

One last thing to ponder in Lent’s closing days comes from the image of those clenched fists holding so tightly to those stones.

Without the first stone, there will not be a second.

Jesus stops the first stone in a brilliant moment of restraint, and that’s all it takes.

Stop the first, and there will be no more.

How often we forget that practical, sensible wisdom!

How badly we need to remember it.

“Where did they go?” asks Jesus. “Where did they go?”
It is no rhetorical or ironic question.
Neither is it a cynical gloating over victory over a case won.
It is a painful question that wells up from deep inside him
out of a hidden grief.
His sadness over this refusal,
his grief over their hardness,
his cry as he looks at their backs rises up this week
to those who have still not embraced the mystery of forgiveness
and with stone filled hands have not found their way to mercy.
Accuser and accused are often the same.
God in the Old Testament always speaks of Israel’s failures
as infidelity and of Himself as the faithful spouse.
The Pharisees know that, and they get the point
when Jesus writes with his finger
for that is the way God wrote on the stone tablets.
They thought they would try Jesus with the trial of the woman,
while all the while, it is they who risk condemnation
by their own lack of mercy.
They are the ones who miss the mercy
because they can’t put down their stones.
“Where did they go?” He asks so sadly.
“Where have we gone?” is the question in Lent’s final weeks.

Audio Available

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Lent 6 Palm Sunday

4/1/2007

Isaiah 50:4-7 + Philippians 2: 6-11 + Luke 22: 14-23:56

Fr. Boyer

One more time this week,
the Passion of Christ will be proclaimed in our churches.
It is long, ponderous, and painful to hear if you really listen.
Like the Stations of the Cross, it is story of brutality, savage and cruel.
It is the story of a society that has become comfortable with execution,
and a society capable of executing the innocent,
and afterward congratulating itself
for having done what had to be done.
It is the story of a society that entertains itself with violence;
a society that cheers at fights,
dismisses the death of the innocent with a shrug
and goes about its grim business as though it never happened.

While our humanity may have grown some,
it can at least recognize Christ as the Son of God in history.
We are at least not proud of what we did in the past on Calvary.
But on the whole we are today only a little less comfortable
with the evil of violence than were the crowds in Pilate's court.
We are barely outraged by brutality,
and it still sells big time
and it flows through cables into our homes.
We have only become a little more sensitive than was Pilate
to the presence of God
in the people we hurt physically, emotionally or economically.
And those who oppose it are not much more numerous today
than they were in Pilate's time, and certainly no more effective.

So we tell the story again as we have for centuries.
It becomes hauntingly familiar,
and the more we realize that we are not proclaiming a historical event,
the more it might really bring about our conversion.
For this is not the story of something that happened a long time ago
when there were Romans and Herod lived.
It has happened today, and may happen again tomorrow if we just stand and watch, or cheer and clap.

Christ did not choose to be crucified.
He chose to be faithful.
It was his fidelity that saves us,
not the suffering to which that fidelity led him.
The crucifixion was pure and simple human violence
at its most brutal and most mindless.
Christ was really only one among hundreds of millions over the centuries who have fallen victim to

human violence.

The fact that we begin to recognize that is our first clue and our first hope to asking why it should continue, and by asking that question, the first movement of salvation begins.

The palms we have held in our hands are ancient signs of peace. We have taken them, blessed them, and now will carry them home. Where they end up and where they are seen must be a place of peace. Those who hold them must be people of peace, for the cry that goes up from palm holders is: a cry for peace.

My dear friends, make the meaning of the palms stronger in your life today. If we do not begin to greet one another with the palm, we shall continue to greet one another with the cross. Which shall it be in our life time, the palm or the cross?
Audio Available

299

Holy Thursday

4/5/2007

Exodus 12: 1-8,11-14 + 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 + John 13:1-15

Fr. Boyer

Before we can get to Communion

we must get to the point that this day is also about food.

It may not be politically correct to say it,

but while much of the world is starving,

Americans are eating themselves to death.

Latest statistics record that 60% of us are overweight.

The chronic obesity of children is an alarming public health issue.

Meanwhile there is a multi-million dollar diet industry in place,

It is also a fact that other than the Bible,

Cook Books are the largest selling items in our book stores.

The super market has become a temple of excess with music, lighting, deli counters, sushi bars, coffee bars, and all kinds of visual seductions designed to prompt us to buy more than we need

and especially things we should not eat.

Just this week I read an article about how junk food ads

are scheduled at times children watch television.

Living to eat has become the focus of much of our culture.

While eating to live is what we are about as a church.

We live in a fast food world with a micro wave beeping,

grabbing a sandwich or chips on the run and eating in our cars!

This is a long way from Sacramental living which is what we are called to.

Sacramental living requires something else.

The Table is the center of life

TV tables, card table or stools that face no one or a television will not do.

In Sacramental living, no one eats in a hurry. No one eats and runs.

For believers, there is no running from communion.

There is too little of it anyway.

There is a question to be asked about a society that builds homes with huge home theaters and recreation rooms and no dining rooms.

There is no mistaking that the largest piece of furniture in this room is a table. It is in the center, and everything and everyone faces the table.

While through the passage of time it has taken on the language of sacrifice and been called an altar;

from our very beginnings, it was a table around which followers of Christ gathered to eat and be

nourished. The heart of our identity is this table and food we share gathered around it. It shapes us, and it forms our values and our lives.

We are a people of communion.

We do not eat alone, or in a rush.

We do not grab a bite and run.

It is no wonder our children and young people have no respect, interest in, nor hunger for the

Sacrament of the Eucharist

when they know nothing of communal and family dining.

The dress, the behavior, the pace all betray a collapse of Sacramental life to which this night and what it

recalls puts before us.

We are in communion, with one another, with the whole church and with God through, with, and in the Body of Christ which we share in this place.

Consequently, world hunger is not a political or economic issue to be solved by diplomats or politicians. It is a moral issue to be solved by believers.

We don't gorge ourselves with our faces in the plate unaware or uninterested in those around us. That is what gluttons do.

We don't grab and run, nor do stroll in at any hour as though it were drive through or take away.

In a world that continues to hammer away at us to take more and more, this gift from God teaches a different lesson: Less is more. Anyone who looks at the banquet on this altar would have reason to think: "There is not enough." But there always is. Here the issue the glutton cannot ever address between quality and quantity is finally settled. Eating here is more than a refueling operation. Here, we eat to live, not live to eat. So the opposite of a glutton is not someone on a diet who counts out calories and carbohydrates, nor is it someone who fasts. The opposite of a glutton is someone for whom food is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is a person who uses food and loves people, instead of loving food and using people.

Decide tonight why are eating here? Who are you eating with? Who is hungry while you are satisfied, and why are they hungry? Communion gives life. Take. Eat. This is my Body broken for you. Take. Drink. This is the cup of my blood poured out for you. It isn't much; but to those who live in the mystery of sacrament, it is more than enough. Inside this awesome reality we never find ourselves alone or lonely; for we will have discovered the mystery of Holy Communion.

Audio Available

300

Good Friday

4/6/2007

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 + Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 + John 18:1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

When I stood in downtown Oklahoma City at the corner of Harvey and Northwest 5th street on April 19, 1996, everyone around me was asking one question: "Why?" For several days following, I was down inside the parking garage of that bombed building with rescue workers. I was there for hours with time to pray and time to wonder.

On April 20th, there was a different focus to it all, and something came over me that I know recognize was a gift of insight that could have come from nowhere else but the Holy Spirit who was very much present in that scene of horror. I stopped wondering "Why", and have never done so since. Only two questions make sense in the face of such a tragedy. "What does this mean?" and "What am I going to become because of this?"

When I read, pray, and proclaim the Passion of Christ, those two questions rise up in me again, and I have found some intriguing insight into the suffering and death of Jesus from the Letter to the Hebrews which we just heard. It is often overshadowed by the powerful reading from Isaiah and the Proclamation of the Passion itself, but this year, I want to draw your attention back to that Epistle.

The author of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the "Great High Priest" who learned obedience from what he suffered, being made perfect in his suffering. To begin to understand this and move toward some answer to the two big questions in the face of this tragic death, it is necessary to understand the traditional role of the High Priest in Judaism.

Once a year, in the Temple at Jerusalem, the High Priest offered sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. Before he could do that, he offered a sacrifice for his own sins committed that year, so that he would be pure and holy making the communal sacrifice perfect. It was on the level of sin that the High Priest could relate to the people. This is what the people and the High Priest had in common; sin.

But Christ "The High Priest" had no sin, and so could not relate to us. There is nothing in common. Here is where the author of Hebrews saw the meaning of Christ's suffering and death. By suffering and by dying, Christ now can relate to us. He shares something with us. We have something in common. The sacrifice he offered was so perfect that the need for an annual repetition was finished. I have begun to believe that this is what Jesus meant when he said: "It is finished."

His obedience to the will of His Father was complete. It was not that God wished him to suffer, but that God wanted Christ to identify with us completely even to the point of suffering and death. Even more so, Christ was obedient because God wanted forgiveness to be made perfect, and so we find the obedient servant even forgiving his executioners, those who denied him, and those who betrayed him. Obedience is what led Christ the High Priest to accept even death in order to relate to the suffering in our lives.

Through the Letter to the Hebrews then, we know the answer to the questions; all of them.

What does the Passion and Death of Christ mean?

It means God knows from experience our suffering, loneliness, and pain.

And it means that those who experience suffering are close to God.
What do we become because of it?
Holy and Redeemed, forgiven, chosen, and loved by God
who has reached out to us in the person of Christ and called us His own.
There is in this Biblical Wisdom even a hint about "Why" this happened.
But only those who love understand how sacrifice works,
how easy it is to make a sacrifice,
to give up something or even one's life for those who are loved.

What at first sounds like a tragedy, a horrible, cruel, and senseless death is really a love story that leads us deep into the mystery and wonder of a God who wills not that we suffer, but that we love enough to sacrifice and forgive one another and so come to perfection.

Audio Available

301

The Great Vigil of Easter

4/7/2007

Luke 24: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

It seemed so immovable.

Rolled in place and set with a seal, that stone was there to stay.

So they thought, but not everyone thought so.

Therein lies the news we share tonight.

Those women did not think it was there to stay.

Heading off to the tomb, they are wondering
who would help roll it away.

We have our own versions of that stone in our lives.

Everyone of us here has felt what it's like to be in a tomb:

what it's like to have a big stone in our way,

what it's like to be trapped, blocked,

or held back from something we want, need or have dreamed of.

We have stones of resentment, long nurtured injuries
that keep us entombed in bitterness or anger and rob us of Joy.

We have stones of the past, mistakes we've made, failures,
disappointments, and broken dreams that rob us of Joy.

We have stones of self doubt and depression,
stones of old memories and shadows of a past that haunt us
and steal our Joy.

We have the stones of ignorance and prejudice,
unbelief and doubt, stones of fear and timidity,
stones of independence and stubbornness that have been in our way, blocked our growth, and stifled
the work of the Spirit.

But we are here, all of us because those stones have not been as permanent as we thought.

A glimmer of light as dim as a candle
shines into the darkness of all that stuff
with a flicker of hope that gives us reason
to think like the women of this Gospel
that someone will roll back those stones.

We are in this holy place, priests and deacon, sponsors, baptized and confirmed, children and
grandparents, friends and neighbors
all because someone has rolled back the stones that have kept us apart, kept us in the dark, and kept us
from the light of a resurrection day.

The story of these women is our best news,
and they are great teachers,
for they came to that tomb in hope and certain
that someone would roll back the stone that kept them from Jesus.

Little did they know along the way what it might all mean
and what would happen when they found the stone rolled back
and what they would become because of it.

It shall not be different for us.
The stones have to go.
Expect that they will,
be confident that by your hope and by the power of Life itself
in Jesus Christ all the stones will roll away.

This is the news we share this night.
This is the way we walk to the tombs that darkness, sin, and Satan may have prepared for us: singing the
Alleluia of Life itself.
Walk together, stay together, preserve the oneness of this holy night.
I believe that they found that empty tomb
and then found the Risen Lord because of their oneness,
because the sin and sadness of death,
the violence, hatred, anger, power, and envy of the days before
did not break them apart, scatter them in weakness, nor destroy the bond and unity for which Jesus had
prayed just before his death.

It shall be so for us. Stay together – that is the essence of “church.”
Look at the ministers at this altar. It is a vision of the church.
Three continents, cultures, colors, and people all one in Christ’s church.
In that unity, no stone stays put, no stone is too heavy, no stone can keep us from the risen Christ.

Be Joyful, Be confident, Be grateful. Be faithful.
Christ is risen, and we shall rise again with him by the power of His Spirit.

Audio Available

302

Easter Sunday

4/8/2007

Acts 10:34-43 + 1 Corinthians 5: 6-8 + John 20: 1-9

Fr. Boyer

With some amusement I was entertained this past winter with news reports that an ancient ossuary had been found with inscriptions that led some to speculate that it contained the bones of Jesus of Nazareth. My amusement at the enthusiasm of the reporters and the speculation of many was short-lived when I began to realize how poorly we have communicated our faith and our experience: the purpose of our assembly here today.

The faith of Christians does not rest upon an empty tomb, nor upon the absence of a body or bones.

Our faith rests upon the continuing experience of the Risen One: upon our experience of Christ living among us.

Somehow we have failed to make that clear, failed to realize and make it obvious that Resurrection Faith is more than curiosity about an empty tomb.

It is a summons to return to the words and deeds of Jesus.

When we get that right, a box of bones isn't going to make any difference.

If we fail to get that right, fail to remember that the Resurrection is about experience, then faith degenerates into intellectual assent, dogmas, and tenets of faith over which people can and do argue, debate, accuse, blame and criticize and to our shame, sometimes even go to war!

Those who address the Resurrection as though it were an idea become world-weary, and the cynicism of prosperity leaves them with no way to resist much less recognize death here and now. They are left with a pitiable hope for the next world as if death were an enemy awaiting us at the end of this life; something off in the future.

But it isn't. Death is not something yet to come, private and personal.

Death is everywhere every day.

It is a power here and now that strangles the life out of people.

There is economic death of those we allow to die of famine.

There is political death for the countless who live under oppression.

There is social death for the handicapped, gay people, the lonely, abused, and any who seem to be "different."

There is the noisy death that comes from bombs and missiles, torture and violence.

There is the quiet death of the apathetic and those who decide to remain ignorant and live in denial.

There is plenty of death, and you don't have to wait for it to come later.

Whatever threatens to diminish or destroy life is near at hand.

Catholics today are summoned to live, proclaim, and celebrate the victory of life by resisting every form of death and violence that saturates our culture. It is our privilege first, and then our duty to bring faith to bear upon death and revolt and protest against it while preserving every form of life.

The raising of Jesus is God's protest against death and against all who work for death. We are here to affirm and recognize God's passion for life and for all those threatened and burdened by death. It means rising above apathy and misery and climbing out of cynicism and denial.

We have to get it straight about what went into that tomb before we can understand what was left and what came out.

More went into that tomb than a dead body.

Hatred went in there. Envy and Lies were put in that tomb. Power, Violence, Abuse, Betrayal, and Jealousy: that is what was buried in that tomb along with the body of one victim of all those things.

There was also something else. Love was buried in there, a love that knew no limits or boundaries; a love that embraced and included everyone. Forgiveness was buried in there: forgiveness for those who asked for it, and for those who didn't.

Mercy was in there; the kind of mercy that tempers judgment and condemnation.

What came out? Does love die? I don't think so. The love of my parents isn't dead. Anyone of you who have buried a loved one

knows that love does not die even when a body is buried.

Does Forgiveness die? I don't think so. The forgiveness to which Jesus bore witness lives on every time we embrace another with understanding patience. So what are we doing here? What's this all about?

All of this is not about a box with or without bones.

It is about Life. It is about Love. It is about Mercy and Forgiveness,

and it is about our faith and our duty celebrate, live, and rejoice in what came out of that tomb and what God has chosen to leave buried in there.

Audio Available

303

2nd Sunday of Easter

4/15/2007

Acts 15:12-16 + Psalm 118 + Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19 + John 20: 19-31

Fr. Boyer

What John's Gospel explores in the experience of Thomas is not about doubt, but about faith and how one comes to it.

Thomas has been absent for whatever reason.

Who can judge or explain what grief will cause and how someone filled with grief will behave?

They were all grief stricken.

Who can judge or explain what fear will cause and how someone willed with fear will behave?

They were all frightened.

For some reason which I suspect is rooted in grief and fear, Thomas has not been there with the others on the first day of the week.

Those who have been together on the first day of the week believe and are filled with faith in the presence of Christ.

Their faith has come from an experience of understanding.

Together they have begun to understand and grasp the meaning of the death of Jesus. How did they do that? From being there together and from their pouring over those ancient scriptures that was always a part of their gatherings. Consequently for them, "Seeing the Lord" was not a matter of physical sighting. It was an awareness expressed as we so often do when we reflect with wonder and memory and finally something dawns on us and becomes obvious. We still say: "I see what you mean."

This "seeing" in John's Gospel is code language for knowing the revelation of Christ at such a depth that life is changed.

Thomas was not there, and so he did not come to see until he arrived.

At which time, a struggle takes place: is faith a matter of the brain, intellect, or is it a matter of experience? It would seem from what went on between them that no amount of conversation, talking or convincing was going to matter or bring Thomas to faith. It had to be a matter of experience. What did he experience there; a vision, an apparition, or a revelation? Which would you prefer? Which would lead you to faith? We see things all the time, but we do not always know what they mean.

The assembled disciples had come to read the signs of the open wounds in the hands and side of Christ. Those wounds were openings through which they could perceive or see into the interior life of Jesus Christ. They were and still are a way in. That wound in his side was like a birth channel from which in nature blood and water flow at the time of birth. That wound in his side is a birth passage into his heart, into the inner reality that he is; and they came to understand. They "got it." They were finally able to "see" what he was and what they were because of it.

Thomas you notice never does really touch anything. What he experiences there in the company of his believing friends leads him to see the channel available to an inner life with God. That coming of Christ in their midst seems to be a regular happening. Every first day of the week Jesus is with them. When they gather, he gathers with them. The doors are locked. He emerges from within them, and when

Thomas is with them, He is present to Thomas.

What Jesus encourages Thomas to do is not touch flesh, but to reach for the divine; to look at wounds, at suffering, at the scars of violence and the evil of hatred and see into them something of God. It did not start in his brain or with his intellect. It started with his desire to be in the assembly and with his willingness to look at the wounds and brokenness his own lack of faith and courage had allowed. He had spoken with such bravado and macho courage when Jesus spoke of his coming agony. But he did nothing to stop it, and in fact, during the whole time of agony, trial and persecution, we never even hear that was on the scene.

Thomas came to believe by spiritually grasping the meaning of the death and suffering of Jesus. Through that understanding and his experience among fellow believers, he received the divine life that is stronger than death. So may be it be for all of us here on this first day of the week, and may the transformation of our lives make others at least a little curious.

Audio Available

304
3rd Sunday of Easter
4/22/2007

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

305

4th Sunday of Easter

4/29/2007

Acts 13:14,43-52 + Revelation 7:9, 14-17 + John 10:27-30

Fr. Boyer

"Search for signs of intelligent life in the Universe" is the name of a play by Jane Wagoner published in 1986. In it we find Trudy, a bag lady. She is a creative consultant for some alien visitors who are on an expedition searching for intelligent life in the universe. They are looking at us wondering if they have found any.

Now Trudy used to be a creative consultant with Nabisco.

Her job was simple: increase cracker sales.

She says: "I got this idea to give Cracker consciousness to the world.

I said, "Mr Nabisco, sir! You could be the first to sell the concept of munching to the Third World. We got an untapped market here! These countries got millions and millions of people don't even know where their next meal is coming from. So the idea of eatin' between meals is something' just never occurred to them!"

Before long she recognizes the evil of her plan, and her mind snaps.

She describes then the problem she has with reality: "I refuse to be intimidated by reality anymore.

After all, what is reality anyway? Nothin' but a collective hunch. My space chums think reality was once a primitive method of crowd control that got out of hand. In my view, it's absurdity dressed up in a three piece business suit. I made some studies, and reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it."

The problem with "reality" as this world sees it, is that it is always there, insisting that we get with the program, face the facts, be practical, use common sense and be reconciled with this world's power. This "reality" is the "Great Ordeal" which the saints endure as we just heard it in the second reading today. There is a great struggle, a struggle of loyalties that poses a bigger threat than death. It is a grim conflict of loyalties that leaves a follower of Christ in genuine doubt wondering where duty lies. How do we see the world: from what it seems to be or from the point of view of what God intends for the world?

The Book of Revelation is a case study in how the early church audaciously confronted the world through its worship. John's communities are bold enough to set their worship head-to-head with the worship of the mighty Roman Empire. They do this in spite of what might be called; "common sense." This "common sense" would say that the real super power in the world is Babylon, or Rome, or if written today, the United States. Revelation insists that the true super power in the world is the Lamb of God whose power is made manifest, not in weapons of violence but in the sword of truth that proceeds from his mouth.

The problem we face to day is the same: how do we not cave in to a common sense that defines reality as the power of wealth, violence, and exploitation of the environment, rather than as the Lamb of God who is before the throne? The Book of Revelation is about Worship and getting worship right. What is it followers of Christ worship: prestige, power, wealth, success, national security? I guess any of us could answer that by looking at our check stubs. Then we're back to "reality".

In John's Revelation followers of Christ call this "reality" into question. Their "common sense" calls them to get with a different program, one proposed by Jesus of Nazareth. Despite what some fundamentalists

may try to tell you, Revelation is about the end of the world, but not about creation ending in some cataclysm that will transport the faithful into some spiritual “other world” distinct from this one. God does not intend escape, God intends victory. Revelation is about the end of this world as we know it..... violent, cruel, selfish, unjust, hungry, lonely, and broken. Revelation is about the coming world, transformed not destroyed. It is about the world as God intends: a world where those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb will hunger no more, will have shelter, suffer no more, and have their tears wiped away.

Seeing the world as God intends it to be is empowering. It gives us the courage to be angry at suffering not reconciled to it. It gives us the courage to be angry at injustice, not shrug and say that it’s just the way it is. It gives the church boldness when facing natural disasters like hurricanes or the smaller more intimate pain of human grief.

John’s vision can transform our understanding of the present. We can see God at work wherever captives are freed, the hungry fed, the homeless wrapped in the warmth of human love, or those fleeing poverty and oppression being welcomed with joy and respect not looked upon as a threat to jobs we won’t take anyway or as a drain on our “system”.

The white-robed: that’s us those Baptized and washed in the blood of the Lamb must not be intimidated by “reality” but rather begin to see this world as God sees it, and let that vision transform us, open our eyes, and make bold our witness. John’s vision of the future is proclaimed here to give us courage, to give us strength, to give us something more than life without end. It can give us the “fullness of life” which is what Jesus offers us, not unending life. It is a full life we are promised, not just one that goes on and on or starts up after death. John’s Gospel describes eternal life not in terms of duration but in terms of fullness. It is life with and for God which Jesus reveals, and it begins when people through faith and love commit themselves to the kind and quality of life that Jesus embodies.

Today the culture of death seems to envelop our lives at the very center of American life, and from the killing fields of political, ethnic, and religious wars, the plagues of pandemics, and even to schoolyards. The promise of present and future eternal life seems fragile. Yet the Good Shepherd promises his flock and those not of his fold that no human life is meaningless or forgotten by God. Love, joy, and life await even those whose lives, barely unfolding, were snatched away, when “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Audio Available

306

5th Sunday of Easter

5/6/2007

Acts 14:21-27 + Revelation 21: 1-5 + John 13:31-35

Fr. Boyer

He has just made it around the table washing their feet.

As he began, he silenced the quick talking Peter who objected at first,
and after that they all kept quiet

and watched as he went from one to another.

It has been a lesson that salvation is a gift from God,
and it must be accepted on God's terms.

Judas has gone, and now he settles down
to make sure they understand that what is about to happen
is about glory, not defeat, and about God, not just about him.

He gives a commandment, not as though it was an "order",
but a commandment in the covenant sense:

a "rule" or way of life in which they will find their identity
and by which they will be recognized.

It is a commandment that is both old and new.

It repeats a verse of the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus
which directs that they should love one's neighbor as one's self.

Yet it is new because now this love will be proof of one's love for God.

This love forsakes violence

and is modeled on the self-offering of Jesus on the cross.

This love goes far beyond feeling or passion,

because this love is based on mutual communication between persons
and it is manifest in deeds, not in words.

Dorothy Day speaks of this love and calls it a "harsh and dreadful thing".

She sees this love as a relationship tried and tested by fire.

It is the fire of perseverance that she refers to:

the fire of fidelity.

It has nothing to do with feeling good.

It has everything to do with doing good

What Jesus reveals to those who would gather at table with him

is that we cannot love God unless we love each other,

and to love each other, we must know each other.

This truth, this theme weaves its way

in and out of his expression and his experience.

He speaks again and again of knowing the Father

and of knowing each other.

For only in that "knowing" can His love be found.

And so, we know him in the breaking of the bread

and we know each other in the breaking of the bread.

With the insight that only a lover could have,
a poet of our time captures the challenge of this love:
“Love does not just sit there, like a stone;
it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new.”

Think of that image for a moment.
It takes work to be and stay in love.
Just like bread which must be kneaded and worked
which must rest and rise, our love cannot simply be left like a stone.
Perhaps what we are called to be in this age and in this culture
of fast-food and instant pleasure is bread bakers:
people willing to work, to knead, to mix, to wait, to watch, to warm,
and ultimately savor what can happen
when love like yeast is worked into the dough of this world.
Jesus must have thought of that when he left himself with us
and lifted a piece of bread and said: This is my Body.

Audio Available

307

6th Sunday of Easter

5/13/2007

Acts 15: 17-2, 22-29 + Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23 -5 + John 14: 23-29

Fr. Boyer

The struggle and the controversy we study in Acts of the Apostles did not end with the decision of Peter.

It was resolved for that time in that place,

but it continues here and now with the same intensity and urgency.

The discernment of what is required to be a member of the Christian Community continues.

The principals established back then in Jerusalem are still valid for us, the details less applicable.

No longer is it a matter of circumcision, and how and where we wash pots and pans according to the Mosaic Law.

What cut through all of that was an awareness that prompted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was revealing and offering a relationship,

and that in the strength of that relationship, one would be known, recognized, and claimed by God and the Savior Christ Jesus.

Our God is a God of relationship.

The unique element that sets Christians off from every other religion is the Trinity --- an expression of that God of Relationships.

Our relationship with God exists because of his love,

and our response which is our spirituality must be a response or a return of that love. Anything else is unhealthy, just as it would be in any relationship. It is not about fear, nor is about rewards or getting everything you want --- that's not mutual love.

Being in love with God means doing everything necessary to make the relationship grow and prosper.

Once you make that kind of relationship your own, then there is no other choice than to live the Gospel completely not because God wants it and we're afraid of what will happen if we don't, but because it is right to do so.

If what Jesus reveals and proposes for us is a loving relationship with God, then we ought to be able to manage that by the same means we maintain our relationships with others we love and others who love us.

If you think it's good and right to spend time with your husband or wife, with your children or your parents, or your best friends, would it not be the same with God? I wonder how many marriages would last or how many families would stay together if they got an hour a week of your time.

Many work, and they work hard to give and provide for their loved ones, but God gets what is left over --- and sometime only on occasion after every other "obligation" is taken care of. Minimalism is not the stuff that makes a relationship, and asking what I will get out of it is a sure path to being out of it.

Our diluted version of being Christ like gives us every reason to sit with these readings to day and wonder once more what it takes to be recognized as a follower of Jesus and claimed by God His Father. It takes more than knowing the Ten Commandments. It means living them and the Beatitudes as well. Jesus wasn't fooling around when he said: "Love your enemies."

He didn't hide the fact that those who were his own would look foolish and be made fun of if not even killed.

What they sorted out back there in Jerusalem were the “life rules” that the community must follow in order to be what it is called to be.

These shape the attitudes and behaviors of those who truly believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

Their mouths were always to carry words of peace and not take up arms.

They were asked to live simply and to consider each others needs.

They were also to not have troubled hearts and live without fear.

In a nutshell, that is the Gospel message, and if we take it seriously, it will have a tremendous impact on how we live.

But there is a problem to be resolved.

We treat each other badly. We sacrifice innocent lives.

We seek money and power destroy the environment, develop land and natural resources for our personal gain, exploit the poor and ask God to bless our wars.

We promote capital punishment, refuse to moderate our sexual behavior, turn our back on the poor and the sick while never raising a question on how much to spend for our “security”.

We abuse and neglect animals, ignore our spiritual lives,

celebrate sacraments when convenient, and disregard the voice of our church. What’s worse, we do this and still feel as though we are right with God.

Perhaps as we move toward Pentecost through these Easter Sundays, we might take a hard and good look at how we measure up to the Gospel, ask what we have put before God and what we have preferred over the Holy Eucharist. Pentecost is coming. Indicators of that Spirit’s presence in the lives of Christian people are public and unmistakable. Our faith and its consequences are not private matters. Being loved and loving in return changes everything.

Audio Available

308

The Ascension of the Lord

5/20/2007

Acts 1: 1-11 + Ephesians 1: 17-23 + Luke 24:46-53

Fr. Boyer

You have just heard the final words of Jesus which Luke records for us.

Because the description of the occasion is so fascinating, I'll bet half of you would be puzzled and pressed to repeat his final command or his last wish.

Artists in every age have painted the Ascension with clouds and feet and up stretched arms, with open mouthed disciples looking up at him.

But hardly anyone remembers what he said as the scene closes.

For Luke in his two volumes it is a moment of transition and revelation.

He records the last instruction simply and directly.

"Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

In the language of Luke, that means:

"Stay together, and wait."

Over time it has come to mean:

"Stay in the church (stay together) and be patient."

We have gleaned all kinds of commandments, rules, does, and donts out of the bible, but this one always seems to slip by un-noticed, but it's there plain as day.

For many of us, this is one of the toughest commandments: waiting.

We don't practice it very well, and judging from attendance figures and a few other indicators, some have decided not to "stay in the city" as this translation instructs.

I recently read that we can easily spend up to a quarter of our lives waiting at stop lights, sitting in airport terminals, standing in line at the post office, the grocery store, doctors' and dentists' office. Waiting on "hold" while some voice without a body tells me that my call is important has convinced me that I have no purgatory left after recently calling my credit card company and listening to every song the Carpenters ever recorded an entering my 14 digit numbers.

We don't like this even though we can joke about it when we are not doing it. Waiting is not our best virtue, but I believe that our identity as followers of Christ is shaped by it. "Wait" is what Jesus said to his disciples, but it was not what they wanted to hear. We would rather be proactive. It is not just children who what to know if we're there yet?

Being told to stay put and wait undercuts our self sufficiency, and suggests that we're not quite ready – that something is lacking.

But Jesus says: "Wait."

He tells us we're not ready, that what is missing is the Spirit, and we can't do anything without His Spirit.

Yet the waiting is difficult, and so we tire of it and want to take control: do it our way, do it now, and be quick.

People who are good at waiting have a lot to teach us.

I think of mothers pregnant with life who wait and hope.

I think of how they are transformed by that waiting

– transformed into loving nurturing mothers.
I think of old people, home bound, waiting in nursing home hall ways.
I think of how they are transformed by that waiting into martyrs:
witnesses to the patience and suffering of Christ
and how they teach us about weakness, powerlessness, and simplicity.

We have much in common with the disciples of Luke and Acts.
We want power, and we seem to be saying:
“Lord, is this the time when you will establish the kingdom we expect?”
But Jesus says “wait.”

But, that waiting is not a meditative, reflective rapture.
The appearance of an angel clears that up immediately.
To wait upon the Lord is for the purpose of renewing our strength,
not hanging around waiting for Christ to return.
We are to go into the city – stay together – be church, be one.
There we shall watch and pray
and in doing so we discover that God is at work.

A great theologian (Karl Barth) suggests that a hand clasped in prayer is the beginning of an uprising
against the disorder of the world.

He also notes that the time between the ascension of Jesus and the return of Jesus is a “significant
pause” in which the primary job of the Church is to wait and pray, “Come Holy Spirit.”

At the ascension the world did not look much like a new paradise. To all appearances, it was pretty
much as it was when he came. If anything for those who followed him it was a bit worse as rumblings of
a persecution began. But after a little waiting and a little prayer, followers became leaders, converts
became missionaries, the healed became healers, and nothing was the same.

They stopped looking up to heaven, and began to look at each other, and got on with the business of
being church and being love.

As mothers tell us when the time comes, “it’s worth the wait.”

Audio Available

309

Pentecost

5/27/2007

Acts 2: 10-11 + 1 Corinthians 12: 3-7, 12-13 + John 20:19-23

Fr. Boyer

It was probably a long wait;
the kind of wait I spoke of last week.
It was probably a wait made all the longer
because they did not know how long they might wait,
nor did they really know what they were waiting for.
They just waited, and they waited together.
That waiting and that staying together resulted
in some powerful and significant changes in those who waited together.
Fear and its power over them was gone.
Timid, inarticulate fishermen went fishing again but not for fish.
Made bold by a promise kept this unlikely group
begins to say and do some unlikely things.
They have been ambitious for themselves.
They have doubted, denied, and been no where to be found
when loyalty to their friend might put them at risk.
He speaks to them of peace, and they draw swords.
But they stayed together and they waited.

What happened to them was not something anyone could have imagined. If the story we tell from Acts of the Apostles was not so familiar, it would be hard to believe.

Peter who couldn't get anything right before now has it all together and isn't afraid to say.

But they are in Jerusalem and we are in Norman.

They lived more than two thousand years ago.

We're living in 2007.

If all that stuff really happened, why does the world look the same?

Why is there so much religious and ethnic rivalry and obvious hatred?

Why is this church born with such promise so easily reduced to quarreling factions arguing over trivial things?

Why does it sometimes look like a side-show or a flea market?

If signs of the Spirit and those born in that Spirit meant the end of different languages and all the self-consciousness that comes from linguistic and cultural difference, what's going on today with our walls, our barbed wire fences and racism? Why is there any racism at all?

Why do we continue to make distinctions between Jew and Greek or Arab and Palestinian, between slave or free, woman or man;

distinctions that favor one at the expense of the other.

Why is there so little peace or comfort, or solace?

Why do we refuse to forgive or be reconciled?

Is Pentecost just a day that comes to close the Easter Season?

What part of this earth's face as been renewed is a very good question.

We have some serious work to do here.

If that Spirit really did come, and if this church was born because of it,
we're not finished with the mission these apostles began.

Instead of forgiveness and healing,

we hang on to hurts and open old wounds.

Instead of making peace, we make more terrorists with our bombs.

When one sure sign of the Spirit's presence

is the end of a language barrier,

and people from every part of the known world become one,

what are we doing to the face of this earth

except working against that Spirit and it's power.

The self righteous accuse poor immigrants from which they are descendants of being "illegal" while they
cheat on their taxes, and rob the pension funds of helpless employees.

I keep wondering who's illegal here?

We have work to do.

Trivial and shallow lives are not compatible with this Holy Spirit.

No one will ever accuse the celebrities of sports or Hollywood of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet our
children idolize them, follow their every greedy escapade, minimize their lust filled lives, and imitate
their style, their dress, and contribute to their inflated incomes.

We have work to do.

When will it begin? When will we no longer need to read about signs of the Spirit's in the past because
they are unmistakably present?

I would propose that the answer is:

When we open ourselves to change.

When we embrace diversity and celebrate its expressions.

When we choose forgiveness rather than revenge.

When we take peace seriously because it is always a matter of justice.

When the comfort of others is our first concern and we find our own comfort in bringing them solace.

When human hearts seek God first, and when a decision or opportunity comes along we wonder first
what God wants of us before what we can get out of it.

These, and wonders like them will be signs of the Spirit's presence,

and then the face of this earth will really be renewed.

We have work to do.

Audio Available

310

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

6/3/2007

Proverbs 8: 22-31 + Romans 5: 1-5 + John 16:12-15

Fr. Boyer

As long as we continue to think that the Holy Trinity is only about God, we will probably never get it, live it, nor understand all that is revealed by and through a God who is present and revealed to us as a creative and loving parent, who poured out love for us enough to take on the human condition even to the point of death, and continues to live in our midst by forming a community of beloved disciples who live in imitation of the One who created and brought them to life.

What I propose to you is that The Holy Trinity is about us too.

I think that is why the Church celebrates this Feast on the Sunday after Pentecost.

This is not just about doctrine.

It is also about experience of living in love as a people of faith.

In as much as we are made in the image of God, then we are an integrated community of love that is inspired, sustained, and enlightened by the spirit of truth.

The deepest meaning of the Trinity is not "God beyond us."

Rather, it is "God for us."

Simply put, Trinity expresses 'the essential truth that the God who saves through Christ by the power of the Spirit lives eternally in the community of persons in love.

Relationship! That is the key to the Christian understanding of God.

A God in relationship is the Father Jesus revealed.

Living in that relationship of love is consequence of the Spirit making love the surest sign of the Spirit.

This is why breaking the relationship is the experience of sin, and the restoration of relationship is salvation by forgiveness.

The examples of sin in the stories Jesus used are always about relationships broken.

Sin and Death its consequence are confronted again and again by Jesus who raises up people in order to restore them to relationships:

the mother in law of Peter, the child of a Roman Centurion, a little girl, and his friend Lazarus.

The one who comes to save us from death restores us to one another.

A people living in faith live in love, and in order to sustain and preserve that love, they forgive.

Without forgiveness, we experience in deep personal and sad ways the absence of God.

What we do when we act together in love is the work of God in this world.

When we respond to brothers and sisters whose lives are up ended by natural disasters is the work of God.

When we share our faith with others, with our children,
when we invite and bring the un churchd to worship with us
or introduce someone to the RCIA or a Bible Study, it is Jesus Christ
still teaching and revealing the Father because he told us to do that.
When we Baptize, Confirm, Forgive, Anoint, Ordain, and bless the covenant of Marriage it is the work of
God who is present, active and alive in those sacramental moments.
This is the meaning of the Trinity:
a living God found in relationships formed by love and fulfilling the Will of God.
Anything we do, by and through love is the work of God,
and our understanding of this draws us deeper into the awesome truth of God's love and God's life.

This Feast then is not intended for a clear articulation of some doctrine.
It is meant to give us an opportunity to commit ourselves to this God who,
though beyond our comprehension is not beyond our experience
because that God is present and active at the very core of our being.

If we concentrate merely on the doctrine,
we might be awed by an intellectual concept.
But if we concentrate as the scripture texts of this day suggest we do
on all the ways our triune God has blessed us, we may be more inclined
to cry out with the psalmist who cry we have taken up already today:
"O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!"

Audio Available

311

Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
6/10/2007

Genesis 14: 18-20 + 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 + Luke 9: 11-17

Fr. Boyer

The fastest growing section of any book store these days is Cook Books. There is even a 24 hour cable channel about food.

At the same time, the diet and exercise industry is booming,
and as a nation we face the terrible fact of child obesity,

A visit to any of our schools makes it an undeniable and troubling fact.

At the same time a greater proportion of our world starves.

A disproportionate number of our own grandparents
suffer from mal nourishment and diabetes

often caused and complicated by issues of diet and food.

We spend more in this nation on pet food than anyone would admit.

It shames us.

On the second Sunday after celebrating the Church's beginnings with Pentecost, we take another look at what we are as a church.

Last week it was about relationships.

The Trinity does not just tell us something about God.

It is also about us, the church:

living every moment of our lives in relationships of love.

This Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is not just about God either.

It is about us, the church,

continuing to live as the Body and Blood of Christ.

There are more than Ten Commandments.

I heard another in today's Gospel: "Give them some food yourselves."

Remember, our God is God who feeds.

Over and over again the scriptures are filled with stories of food.

The Last Supper isn't the only food story in the Gospels.

A people who believe in and make themselves obedient to that God,

a people who pray daily for the will of that God to be done

might be ready for a big question at judgment time:

"Did you feed them?"

This Sunday set aside to honor and remember

the presence of Christ and his body and blood

demands that we reflect upon ourselves

and what we become because of that symbol.

Symbols are effective, not static signs pointing to something else.

To recognize a symbol is to be changed.

This church which we are

is both called to give and become food for others,

because we are the presence and life of Christ
who gave and became food for others.
This Eucharistic gift we have is not just something to look at.
It is food for us: food to nourish our growth
and strengthen our resolve to be food for others.
That Body was broken for us to bring forgiveness.
How many more bodies have to be broken before we give it?
That Blood poured out for us was to bring us peace.
How much more blood must be spilled before we choose it?
Jesus believed that his body and blood would be enough.

We live in a world starved for peace and thirsty for justice.
We live in a society broken and fractured by divorce and racism.
A big helping of forgiveness and compassion
would ease the hunger of loneliness,
but it must be the forgiveness we give.
Feeding as Christ commands
is not a matter of countless sandwiches in brown bags.
While we make the sandwiches, we must be changing the system that makes it necessary to fill the bags
for people who come again and again. It is a matter of a changed heart and a changed life.

Until then we might ponder the fact that Gluttony, a deadly sin with food
is a sin committed alone.
Gluttons eat with their face in the plate, eating as though there would never be another meal; or as
though consuming is all they are about.
I remember as a child my mother and father saying time and time again at the table: "Stop talking and
eat your food."
With a little Gospel wisdom, I now realize what I was learning at that family table: look into the face of
another, not at your plate;
talk a little more and take a little less,
pass the food before you take some for yourself.
It was Eucharistic wisdom in that house.
We would probably take a little less
if we listened and talked with others a little more.
And we would probably come to understand that in doing so
we will discover the face of the God who feeds us and says again:
"Give them some food yourselves."

Audio Available

312

Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
6/10/2007

Fr. Metzinger

Audio Available

313

Ordinary Time 11

6/17/2007

2 Samuel 12: 7-1- + Galatians 2:16-21 + Luke 7:36-8:3

Fr. Boyer

This little love story in the seventh chapter of Luke's Gospel is troubling and far too complex for the superficial and shallow. This silly Pharisee can't even see what is going on in his own house. All he can see is that she "touched him." He is so shallow that he cannot see that Jesus touched her first. These Pharisees are too busy "watching" Jesus. They are so busy "watching" that they cannot see him. The preacher of repentance comes to the home of the Pharisee who refuses to repent. Conflict and controversy are sure to come.

These Pharisees have been busy attacking both John the Baptist and Jesus. Their shallow superficial lives cannot begin to deal with the message John and Jesus have brought: a call to change. Unwilling to address the challenge of that message, they content themselves with name calling and character attacks.

So obsessed with externals, the Pharisee cannot look into the wonder of what is happening in his home. He thinks Jesus cannot see what kind of woman this is, when in fact, Jesus sees quite well not only what kind of woman she is, but also what kind of man he is.

Compassion and Forgiveness are not for the shallow who can only look at the sins of others. To enter into the mystery of compassion and forgiveness one must venture into the depths of one's own sin, name it, and then recognize the source of grace and mercy. Her presence there in the house of that Pharisee suggests a powerful tension in this gospel that takes the form of a question: Do we love because we are forgiven, or are we forgiven because we first love? Forgiveness is not something earned. We are not forgiven because we love. We are forgiven because we are loved, and the embrace of that love changes everything. It is called "faith."

This is the real story being told in this Gospel: a story of love, not the love of the woman, but the love God has for her.

She has come to realize it, believe it, hear it in the teaching of Jesus, and it brings her to his feet.

The Pharisees who talk among themselves, but not to Jesus can not grasp the simple connection between love and forgiveness. And so, they stay in their shallow little game-playing world pointing at the sins of others, calling Jesus “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” while they fail to see that Jesus is really a friend of God.

That woman who has no name teaches without words a lesson only those who listen to Jesus can learn. The Pharisee will not listen, he will only watch, But she has listened and heard the news of God’s Love. The gift of that love is forgiveness, and the loving response in her heart leads her to service and sacrifice. What the Pharisee does not do for the divine guest in his home, she does because she has heard the news of God’s love for her and risks the scorn and judgment of the Pharisee to enjoy the presence of mercy.

The observers think Jesus is forgiving her sins when he is actually confirming her love. This places the emphasis not on divine forgiveness but on the human openness and courage to respond to that love. It is her faith that saves her in contrast to the Pharisee whose lack of faith keeps him from love.

A holy woman in our own times described sin as the “Ice Age:” a slow advance of cold, a freezing process which we experience and try to forget; the absence of warmth, love, caring, trust and the destruction of our capacity for relatedness. It means being separated from the ground of life, having disturbed relationship to ourselves, our neighbor, the creation and the human family. The end of sin then will mean the warming of our hearts, the reunion of the human family, an age of compassion led by those who have suffered, and ultimately, the victory of love found in sacrifice and service.

Audio Available

314

Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist
6/24/2007

Isaiah 49: 1-6 + Acts 13:22-26 + Luke 1:57-66, 80

Fr. Boyer

It is Jesus who gives us cause for our celebration today.

It was Jesus who said: "Amen I say to you, there has not been born of woman a greater man than John the Baptist."

Because of that divine praise, we step out of Ordinary time today
to remember the greatest prophet,
to tell again this story of his birth,
and give thanks
for the courage and vision that motivated his self – effacing life.

Ages ago, someone with a great insight into creation
placed this feast of John's birth
directly opposite the birth of Christ.

A celestial phenomenon occurs today, a solstice.

Ancient patristic writings tell us that the birth of Jesus was placed on the calendar when the northern hemisphere experienced the longest night and the sun's reversal toward longer days.

We are at summer's solstice today with the shortest night
and the longest day.

Tomorrow the days shall begin to shorten again
leaving people of faith with hope that the darkness
which will now begin to grow will not prevail.

There is Light eternal that will reverse the power of darkness.

So as we celebrate the Birth of John the Baptist,
it is not simply all about him.

He would not have wanted it so anyway judging from what I have always considered his greatest line:
"He must become more and more. I must become less and less."

As with every birthday celebration,
there is always reason to think of and rejoice with those who gave birth, and so in John's story
the figures of Elizabeth and Zachariah, his parents are remarkable.

If the childless couple had given up,
where would we be?

If they had tired of waiting for God,
or had because of their childless condition turned angry
or perhaps bitter from the scorn and reproach of others,
what might have happened?

No one would have preached repentance,
and so forgiveness would never have been born.

No one would have pointed to the unlikely son of a carpenter
and so Immanuel would have never been recognized.

Had there been no herald, the message would have never be heard.

Had no one remembered the promise, it's fulfillment would be missed.
Without a witness, the Truth would be in vain.

And so today we rejoice, remember, and ponder
the need to wait in hope for God to act;
the memory of what happens when we become less and Christ become more;
and the joy that awaits those who never tire of expecting
the message of an angel and the power and presence of God.

Audio Available

315

Ordinary Time 13

6/30/2007

1 Kings 19:16, 19-21 + Psalm 16:1-2,5,7-11 + Galatians 5:1, 13-18 + Luke 9:51-62

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

316

Ordinary Time 13

7/1/2007

1 Kings 19:16, 19-21 + Psalm 16:1-2,5,7-11 + Galatians 5:1, 13-18 + Luke 9:51-62

Fr. Boyer

There is a way of thinking in our age
that has never seemed quite right to me.
I've heard it expressed
as advise to graduates more times than I can count.
I've heard it from young people
advising their peers like the blind leading the blind,
and I've seen it peddled in advise columns
with all the authority of the printed page.
It always seems shallow and self serving.
"Follow your feelings." is the silly suggestion
offered when nothing better comes to mind.

The folly of this thinking came to mind as I was reading
and reflecting on this Gospel passage for the past couple of weeks.
Following one's feelings is this world's proposal for success
or recipe for feeling good.
The truth of the matter is it does not make one feel good.
It makes one narcissistic.
"If it feels good, do it" is the moral measure of that system.
But that system is not compatible
with any communal living or with Gospel life.
Confronting or rebuking this silly idea
proposes something else for disciples;
it is better to be good than to feel good.
We shall hear more of that from Jesus next week.

James and John in this gospel want to follow their feelings.
Jesus rebukes that idea without exception.
Life in the Kingdom of God is not about following feelings.
In fact, not many feelings lead to the Kingdom of God.
There is something higher, something greater than feelings
that moves a would-be disciple.
It is Jesus himself

We ought not follow our feelings through this life
he proposes with his rebuke.
Our feelings ought to follow us.
This powerful rebuke still speaks to us anytime
our feelings lead us rather than Jesus.
Do not waste time on revenge no matter how justified you think it is.
Seek other opportunities.
Do not daydream about romance.

Face the harsh challenge of real love in an unloving world.
Do not commit yourselves to a way of life that kills the spirit.
Follow what gives life.
Do not keep looking to others for permission or approval.
Look within to a higher self that is there by grace
and unfolding all the time.
Finding, discovering, celebrating our reason for being alive
is not an experience of feelings.
It is an experience of faith lived in holy obedience
to the Word and the Will of God.

Our decisions, day in and day out,
big ones and little ones have to do with the truth of who we are
and what we were created to be.
Our response to disappointments, rejection, tragedies, and sin
may not come out of feelings of anger, revenge, or righteousness,
but only from the depths of our faith and our love rooted in
and living in the Life of Christ.
It is the only way to Jerusalem.
As Jesus of Nazareth began to realize and understand what God asked of him, he did not follow his
feelings.
His feelings followed him.
And so, feelings of compassion, forgiveness, and mercy followed from the truth of who he was.
So it must be for us.
We cannot be led by feelings.
But we may see our feelings flow out of what we have become.
Audio Available

317

Ordinary Time 14

7/8/2007

Isaiah 66: 10-14 + Psalm 66: 1-7, 16, 20 + Galatians 6:14-18 + Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20

Fr. Boyer

These disciples have it all wrong, and Jesus corrects them quickly
not to spoil their joy, but to root it in the right place.

Like last week Jesus had to question their desire to follow their feelings instead of following his lead.

This week it's a matter of what might be the focus of their attention
and the source of success and joy.

They come back all impressed with themselves
over what they have seen and what they have done.

All of those exciting things, all that power, all those gifts!

It's almost too much for them.

You can sense that they came back on the run
ready to celebrate their victories.

But that's not the point Jesus says to them.

Their joy, and ours as well cannot come from what we do.

It must spring out of who we are, and what we are as God's children.

"On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?" Then I will declare to
them solemnly, "I never knew you. Depart from me you evildoers."

Jesus affirms for his disciples then and today

that every word and work however significant or sensational
must be informed and inspired by daily surrender to God's Will,

rooted in God's Grace, and a revelation of God's presence and love.

The good things that happen, the peace, the reconciliations,

the healings, the comforting, the feeding of the hungry,

the welcoming of strangers, the defeat of evil and hatred happens because of who we have become and
our deepening awareness of what we are as a people saved and redeemed and free from sin.

The heart of what Jesus would have us understand
is that the people who carry the revelation are the revelation.

The dying and rising of Jesus

is not simply a story we tell about Jesus of Nazareth.

It is something we too live and breathe and celebrate and believe.

Each new generation of carriers becomes the Body of Christ,
the visibility of God's presence on earth.

So it's not about doing things.

It is about becoming something/someone.

That is cause for Joy.

The most astonishing thing that should stir our spirits

has nothing to do with what we do

but rather with what God through Jesus does to us.

God naturalizes us, so to speak.

God takes us out of this world to make us citizens of the Royal Realm.

What is promised for the end of the ages is a reality right now.

What better news is there, or what better reason to rejoice
than to hear the news that our names are written in heaven!

Audio Available

318

Ordinary Time 15

7/15/2007

Deuteronomy 30: 10-14 + Psalm 69 + Colossians 1:15-20 + Luke 10:25-37

Fr. Boyer

This parable would certainly rank in the top five of remembered and well known parables.

Images from it have been reproduced in windows of the greatest cathedrals. Painters like Rembrandt and Giordano have put it on canvas.

Hospitals and health-care facilities have named themselves after it.

It is a by-word for responding to the needs of others.

But all of that is a shallow glance at a profound and important instruction of Jesus along the way to Jerusalem.

In the end, parables are always about God.

They reveal something about God, instruct, challenge, and form disciples

who would take up the work of Jesus Christ, the work of God.

As always, in the retelling, layers of meaning and points of focus develop and shift.

Those who first heard the parable from the lips of Jesus would have identified first of all with the man in the ditch.

From his perspective, it's a very different story.

Different listeners can move around from character to character and have plenty to think about.

In our age, when story telling is mostly for entertainment, the story hardly says much at all,

especially when we are so removed from the whole idea, the whole conflict that lies behind this story.

Even the conflicts come at different levels:

there is the conflict between the lawyer and Jesus;

a conflict within the law itself;

a conflict between the cultures

as the whole idea of a Samaritan being moved with compassion

collides with the hatred and racism of that time;

and not least of all is the conflict within the boundaries that define who is a "neighbor."

At the level of Luke's story telling, this parable is about God, and it might seem a bit shocking to realize that he is using someone considered an enemy to reveal a quality of God for the sake of those who, made in the image of that God, might be called to let that image shape their behavior.

At the same time, there is a confrontation of attitude here that fits in with the three previous stories which we told last week and the week before.

First it was James and John with their outburst of revenge which Jesus rebukes.

Then it was the Joy of those returning disciples that Jesus must redirect lest they think it's all about their power. Now it is another attitude that must be called into question before the journey to Jerusalem delivers Jesus to his Glory. This is the attitude we see in the lawyer. He is trapped in the "do to get" thinking that is still way too common among us!

"What must I do to win the inheritance of everlasting life?" he ask.

For him, an action or decision only has value when compared to the reward attached to it.

Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter when he says:

"Do this and live." because there is no gap between the present and the future. The action is its own reward.

It is not a matter of doing something and then waiting to be rewarded, presumably after death.

What Jesus and Luke would have us understand is that acting with compassion and mercy is an immediate experience of everlasting life, the Reign of God.

This is a tough thing to get our minds around; this business of always deciding what to do because of what we get. It's back to last week's issue now moved a step further.

We do things because of who we are, and what we do is the very action of God.

In terms of the characters of this story, God acts like the Samaritan, crossing dangerous territory with healing and help.

God takes risky and foolish actions, like sending his only Son to save life.

Eternal life will be able to be inherited only because of the perilous actions Jesus takes on behalf of all who are neighbor.

To inherit this life one must "go and do likewise."

In other words: "Go and do what God does."

When you do, you will be living in the fullness of life and death will have no power over you.

Audio Available

Genesis 18:1-10 + Psalm 15 + Colossians 1:24-28 + Luke 10:38-42

Fr. Boyer

In Sufi literature there is a story told that leads to the point of these verses in the Journey Narrative.

"Master," said a disciple, "I saw a man who could fly."

"So?" said the master, "a bird can fly."

"Master," said the disciple, "I saw a man who could live under water."

"So?" said the master, "a fish can live underwater."

"Master," said the disciple, "I saw a man who, in the twinkling of an eye, could move from one town to another."

"So?" said the master, "Satan can do that."

"If you wish to find something truly extraordinary," the master continued, "find a man who can be among people and keep his thoughts on God."

Superficial religion often gravitates to the spectacular:

Men flying, living under water,

instantaneously traveling from one place to another.

Some people consider this to be the supernatural stuff of real religion.

There are countless other trivial but fascinating examples

that excite those who busy themselves with the curious and spectacular.

Images of Christ in clouds, the face of the Blessed Mother in a reflection,

all provide modern versions of the Sufi disciple's ideas.

The truly extraordinary, the marvelous and wonderful ideal life of a disciple is found in that virtue of being "among people and keeping one's thoughts on God."

This is the point of this Gospel lesson.

Removing it from its connection to last week's Samaritan story is not a good way to get to the heart of the message.

A question began this section of the Gospel a few weeks back:

"What must I do?"

From that dialogue there came an affirmation

of what is written in the Law:

"Love God – Love Neighbor" to sum it up briefly.

What we see in the story we proclaim this week is the living of the law:

Love of God – Mary

Love of Neighbor – Martha.

The two are not to be separated.

This is not an either/or issue, and to make it so misses the point.

So, coming on the heels of the Samaritan story,

this is a shocking reversal.

Having just heard Jesus tell the story of someone who goes the extra mile to help someone, we should expect Jesus to urge Mary to help Martha.

First he praises the one who serves: that Samaritan.

Then he praises one who sits and listens to the word of the Master.
In a true disciple, these two roles go together.

There is another interesting little twist to this story.

Mary is breaking a social barrier. She is behaving like a man.

In that time and culture, women stayed in the kitchen and tended to those things. Men sat at the feet of a rabbi, listened, and conversed.

In a subtle little way, Luke is opening the role of the disciple to women, and confirming their call to ministry.

Bringing home the whole message of this Gospel puts a challenge and an opportunity in every home where Jesus is the guest.

Both men and women would do well to think through the layers of meaning possible with these verses.

Seeking the wisdom of a balanced life,

both husbands and wives might well examine how it goes at home.

A husband or a wife who is busy providing like Martha,

whose whole focus and identity is on work and providing for others is not keeping the balance Luke proposes for a true disciple.

There must also be an equal measure of presence, like Mary;

that presence of intimacy, of taking time to simply listen,

and sitting with another for the sake of love

is just as important as keeping the bills paid.

In homes and in relationships where that balance is kept,

Jesus is easily found.

That balance must be the same in every loving relationship,

even with God. It is not always necessary to be doing something,

and prayer is not always saying something.

Adoration is very silent and done best without words.

To a culture like ours, to a people who are so busy and always in the fast lane, Jesus then speaks a word of caution and word of wisdom.

It's not that Martha is better than Mary or the other way around.

It's that one without the other is not the way of a disciple.

Audio Available

320

Ordinary Time 17

7/29/2007

Genesis 18:20-22 + Psalm 138 + Colossians 2:12-14 + Luke 11:1-13

Fr. Boyer

As always we all start with this text thinking it's about us.

"Teach us to pray." say these disciples.

Along with a response to their request however comes news about God.

After all, what good is it to know how to pray
if you don't know the one to whom you pray?

In those times, every rabbi had a unique formula of prayer
by which his disciples would be known.

Obviously the disciples of Jesus
have been hanging around disciples of John.

From what we can tell from the text,
disciples of John had their prayer, and with it, their group identity.

There's no way of knowing what that prayer was like;
but it is clear that they had one, and with it then,
they were known as John's disciples.

Now it's disciples of Jesus who want to have their prayer
and with it, their identity.

They get what they ask for and even more.

It is important to notice that the instruction of Jesus
does not stop with passing on of a formula.

As soon as he gives them a formula, he goes on to tell them more.

The instruction is not about words.

The "how" of praying is not about what words to use.

It is about how to use them.

More is needed than words.

Disciples must have a proper interior disposition
that is based the right understanding of who they are
and who God the Father is.

He uses the image of a Father and his children
to jolt them into a mindset that makes prayer effective.

If there is persistence and confidence in the one who asks, seeks, and knocks, there will be no resistance
in the Giver.

What Jesus reveals in this instruction is something about God
and something about disciples in the right relationship with God.

God is willing to give, but one must ask.

God is willing to reveal, but one must seek.

God is willing to open the door, but one must knock on it.

God is willing to answer prayers, but one must pray.

The heart of this passage is in the simple verse:

If a human parent will give good things to their children:

God will do even more to those who ask.

So, having established that God is waiting to give,
what remains is whether or not we are willing to ask without ceasing.

Prayer for a disciple of Jesus is more than a formula of words.
It is a persistent, constant, never ending way of life.
Prayer for disciples of Jesus does not stop.
They do not quit no matter how long it takes.
The prayer of disciples is a prayer in faith and confidence.
No disciple of Jesus ever quits or stops
because their prayer rests on a revelation Jesus provides
about the Father which encourages and sustains their prayer.

So there is more here than a lesson in prayer.
There is a revelation about God that cannot be passed over lightly.
God waits and God wants to answer our prayer.
The only prayer never answered is a prayer that has ceased.
In her great spiritual wisdom, Theresa of Avila insisted that
the only time God does not answer prayer is when there have been none.

The real wonder or mystery of prayer is that it changes us, not God.
Our prayer may not change situations for which we pray,
but it will always change us in the praying.

Audio Available

321

Ordinary Time 18

8/5/2007

Ecclesiastes 1:2 2:21-23 + Psalm 90 + Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11 + Luke 12:13-21

Fr Boyer

In many ways, he is a good man. He is lot like many of us.

There is nothing here to make us think he has mistreated his workers, cheated anyone, manipulated the market, or been dishonest in any way.

In fact, it is just the opposite.

He clearly has worked hard.

His land produced bountifully;

the soil, the rain, the sun joined in making him a wealthy man.

He makes an economic decision and replaces his barns with bigger ones.

He is not wasteful. He is not careless.

There is no suggestion here that he is unjust.

But, he is fool!

In a rare and sudden outburst, God speaks out like no where else in the scriptures.

God says what we are in the scriptures forbidden to say: "You fool!"

The problem here, the behavior that merits this outburst is revealed in the man's conversation.

He speaks only to himself.

Listen to that text again.

"He asked himself" it says, and then, what's worse, he answers himself.

"What shall I do? I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones."

I shall store all my grain and other goods, and

I shall say to myself, rest, eat, drink, merry."

It's all about him.

His individualism has isolated him to the point that he converses only with himself and answers his own questions. He really is a fool.

Has he no family?

Has he no servants, no obligations, no God?

There is his foolishness.

Because he lives for himself, he falls into greed, and the appetite of greed is always the same: it eats yet remains hungry.

Greed is that endless search for more that always leaves the searcher with a desire for more rather than with fulfillment.

Greed was seen as particularly vicious in the culture of Jesus' day in light of their perception of limited good.

This notion asserts that there is only a limited amount of any good thing; anything that one acquires is someone else's loss.

Contrary to capitalistic notions that all can increase in wealth, in first-century Palestine the operating assumption is that everything is finite and cannot be expanded.

It remains to be proven that capitalism's claim is correct.

In fact, the days in which we live with the rich getting richer

and the poor getting poorer would lend more credibility to the old idea from the time of Jesus. If someone's share gets larger, someone else's decreases.

At the time of Jesus, desiring more for oneself was the most insidious of vices, because it was utterly destructive of village solidarity.

Look at that family torn apart in a dispute that started this response from Jesus.

Riches in themselves are neutral;

it is what is done with them that reveals the allegiance of one's heart.

The process of amassing wealth is colored by the intent driving it.

This fool accumulates, not the better to serve others out of love for God

but, rather, to finance his own anticipated extravagant leisure.

What's wrong with this picture?

The dire consequence of greed is the destruction of community as it brings conflict between brothers and sisters over ownership.

It makes an idol out of possessions,

so that one who stockpiles has no thought of the One to whom all things truly belong.

It feeds a delusion that power and salvation rest in one's own accomplishments.

That is foolish thinking, says Luke at the stop on the way to Jerusalem.

Since we began Gospel readings from the Journey Narrative,

Jesus has said again and again that it is not what we do that matters,

but what we become.

Today he says that it is not what we have that matters,

but who we are as revealed by what we do with what we have.

A prominent theme in the Third Gospel is the question of how possessions relate to discipleship.

The risk with possessions is that we begin to think

that what we have will save us and therefore we save ourselves.

It's like the continuous stockpiling of weapons we seem to be into these days.

The more we have the more we think we will be safe.

Meanwhile our resources are depleted more and more, and all we get is more and more fear.

This foolish business brings a weariness of soul that only fuels more greed.

Again and again Luke raises the subject of possessions for disciples.

The simple truth he teaches is that wealth brings privilege and duty, never one without the other.

As Jesus reveals the nature of God,

he invites us deeper into that image in which we have been made.

To be true to the image in which we were made, we give like God gives.

So many of you work so hard to leave so much to your children:

it leaves me to wonder what it is exactly you want to teach them

and what you really want to leave for them.

Perhaps more than anything we might simply

teach our children to be in this world and not of this world;

teach our children to put their trust and the future in the hands of God,

teach our children how to be good stewards, not good consumers, and

teach our children that their value and their identity is not in what they have or what they do,
but in who they are as children made in the image and likeness of God:
a God who gave up his only son for the sake of others.

Audio Available

322

Ordinary Time 19

8/12/2007

Wisdom 18: 6-9 + Psalm 33 + Hebrews 11:1,2, 8-19 + Luke 12:32-48

Fr. Boyer

That kingdom promised so convincingly by Jesus
was a long time coming.

Those whose faith in that Kingdom
were brought to hope for it by eye witnesses.

Luke preserved their stories and memories,
but they were beginning to die off.

Stories of healing, of the dead being raised to life,
and memories of how he fed huge crowds helped for awhile.

His instructions about forgiveness, trust, generous kindness, and
mercy were still fresh in their minds.

But their expectation that it was all going to come together and sweep them into glory was beginning to
fade.

It was a long wait, and some began to wonder.

If they had it wrong about how and when it would come to be,
perhaps they had it wrong about the whole thing.

Maybe none of it was true.

Into that thinking comes Luke's Gospel and the parables of today.

The building of that Kingdom
was obviously not going to be by the hand of Jesus.

Rather, it would come pass slowly built by the patient conscious effort of the people over generations of
time.

The story of these parables is not too far from the truth.

In the face of what seems to be the absence of the Lord,
and what seems to be His reluctance to build the Kingdom he promised;
the great temptation to build one's own kingdom is great.

The thinking goes like this:

If this is all there is, and if this world is where we're going to live,
and if it really is just our world and not God's,
we had better carve out a chunk of it for ourselves.

If we look around and see that what really makes a difference in this world is power, possessions,
influence, then we would be fools
not to put our reliance on those things as well.

The silence of Christ leaves all sorts of opportunities
to fill that silence with our own voice.

The risk is that we might begin to sound like the man of last week's story
and talk to ourselves and substitute Christ's design of the Kingdom with our own.

Luke's Gospel fills that silence for us
and for those who would be disciples of Jesus,
it is possible that the silence is really an invitation to listen.

We do not live with the absence of Christ if we listen for his voice.
He is present for people of faith, present in the church
where those first disciples found him when they thought he was dead.
What is discovered in the waiting is the gift of faith,
but that faith is not something we have.
It is something we do because of our relationship with God.
This faith is not a kind of token we save up and use to get something,
but a sign of shared responsibility.

Those who wait with that kind of faith
are not waiting with some vague notion of Christ's return,
but live with a very real sense of his presence in the needs of our world.
Rather than begin to build our own kingdom in the absence of Christ,
these parables suggest that we might busy ourselves
with completing His work.
Doing so might raise in us a new sense of urgency
because we have been entrusted with so much,
and there is a growing consciousness of the acute need
for redistribution of this earth's bounty and for just stewardship.
These parables suggest that the proper time for justice and for right distribution is not some future time
when the "master" suddenly arrives,
but rather it is the work already being done
by faithful stewards when the critical moment comes.

It is a long wait for the Kingdom and for Christ's return,
but not because he has failed to be present
and not because he has been silent.
The wait is made all the longer by failing to see that what God has given us is sufficient for the building
of that Kingdom and the completion of God's creation. While we wait for God to do something,
God is waiting for us to be something: good and faithful stewards,
busy every day not with "just doing good" but with life as it shall be in the Kingdom of God which has
already begun.

Audio Available

Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6, 10 + 1 Corinthians 15:20-27 + Luke 1: 39-56

Fr. Boyer

For centuries Christian people have believed what we celebrate today.

At some point in the seventh century, the western church, ours embraced this feast already celebrated by the eastern church.

Mary's transition from this world to the next was celebrated by Christians centuries before November 1, 1950

when Pope Pius XII put his pen to the Apostolic Constitution which articulates our faith on this matter.

In it, he offered a survey of the history of the Church's belief in Mary's assumption down through the centuries and mentioned the way in which the Church's awareness of faith developed this truth from the basic data of revelation about Mary.

What is curious and worth some thought today is why 1950?

If our faith about this matter of Mary's passage into glory had been around so long and was celebrated so widely, why did it take until 1950 for a Pope to say something about it and confirm our universal belief.

As I have thought through that matter, I am beginning to see something very important and worthwhile that has everything to do with this Feast and what it means to us.

Think for a minute about the world of 1950, or about the years just before 1950 when the Pope would have been putting together this Apostolic Constitution.

An entire continent had been fought over, bombed, ransacked, and destroyed.

In the aftermath of that war, great crimes were made known, including the systematic murder of more than six million during the Holocaust.

Relief and refugee agencies struggled to deal with the hoards of displaced people, while a new terror took hold of the western world as the Iron Curtain of Communism divided the continent and the city of Berlin.

The sweet taste of victory over the tyranny of Fascism was quickly turning into the bitter gall of the Cold War.

At that moment in history, a Pope turned our thoughts to the Blessed Mother as a gift of hope and a reminder of God's fidelity to the faithful.

Seen against the backdrop of that history,
this is a feast of Hope, a feast that invites us
as two of the readings suggest today
to look up.

But looking up is tough to do when there is so much to get us down.
This feast reminds us
that when we are confronted with great trials
and seemingly endless despair about the world as it is,
we can still have hope.

This Feast is not so much about Mary as it is about God
a God who is with us to the final end,
leading us to the eternal city in which he reigns
and in which Mary dwells.

This God would have no more death or mourning,
no more crying out or pain, because death is swallowed up in victory, the victory of Jesus Christ
who subjects everything — even death — to himself.

This is what the Assumption is finally all about.

It is about what hope there is for us;
and what awaits those who listen to God's call,
and give flesh to His Word.

Audio Available

324

Ordinary Time 20

8/19/2007

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10 + Psalm 40 + Hebrews 12: 1-4 + Luke 12: 49-53

Fr. Boyer

"The day will come when, after harnessing the winds, tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, human beings will have discovered fire."

I wish I had written those words! I remember the first time I read them.

I remember where I was, and what I was feeling.

It was in the 60s, and the book I was holding had a picture of a nuclear bomb explosion.

That all too familiar mushroom cloud with its shock wave looking like the ripples in a glassy pond after throwing a rock off the shore.

The war in Vietnam was out of everyone's control.

We were polarized as a nation.

A young Jesuit scholastic had just set himself on fire in Washington DC and the Archbishop of that place had scorned his self sacrifice.

I was his age, trying to figure out what my life was all about and what faith and God was asking of me.

In Spiritual direction one dark Indiana winter's evening, feeling alone and helpless I sat with an old Benedictine who handed me a little book called: "Toward the Future" by Teilhard du Chardin.

Since that time, I have understood this passage from Luke's Gospel in a profoundly different way than I had heard it before.

I always wondered how the preacher of love, this peaceful, generous, compassionate Jesus of Nazareth should find himself saying these things.

I was learning in class how to read Luke, with his symbols, his images, his focus and perspective on the life, words, and deeds of Jesus.

Luke, you remember is the fire breathing writer who has powerful winds and tongues of fire descending upon the apostles in that upper room.

Luke is the writer who has disciples with burning hearts in the presence of a stranger who breaks bread with them.

Luke is the one who has John Baptist promise one who will Baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire.

We have read today from Jeremiah the prophet who said:

"There is within me something like a burning fire shut up in my bones."

Jeremiah who hears God say to him: "I am now making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them."

At the same time, it is a constant challenge to understand and reconcile the passion of Jesus Christ for unity, tolerance, respect, and love

with his words about the inevitability of family conflict.

There are not many parents in this church who have not felt the sting and experienced the sadness of child's refusal and share faith and worship, to share prayer and a sacramental life in this tradition.

It is painful, and a profound feeling of emptiness helplessness sweeps through this place and every heart when another gifted life is seduced by the lure of pleasure and materialism, consumerism and shallow ambition.

Between here and the exits for Moore, palaces of entertainment are going up as fast as the steel and concrete can be set in place. In the other direction a casino bigger than any Cathedral of Europe bears witness to our need to be entertained. The truth is we are entertaining ourselves to death, and it will be a painful, lonely kind of death.

Old Zorba in the musical bearing his name called domesticity the "full catastrophe." The drag of sedentary life, the temptation to settle down, relax and take it easy is the greatest of all temptations because it keeps us from growing, changing and realizing what God has called us to become. In this kind of life there is no fire, no passion, no burning desire, and no vision of things to come. There is only nagging loneliness and a cold empty fear that this might be all there is.

The fire Jesus came to ignite is more than excitement about our children's soccer league or OU football. Would that there could be as much passion, interest, and commitment to Christ as there is to our contests and entertainment. The kind of Faith Jesus calls for makes us face reality and see ourselves as we really are, citizens of God's kingdom, not really at home here, and always feeling just a little out of place. If you ever have even a hint of that feeling, the embers of the fire Jesus came to ignite are still smoldering and filled with promise. The wind of God's Spirit will stir these embers and warm us back to life. On that day we shall be bold enough to risk scorn and disapproval by choosing peace in a world that has been persuaded that violence, bombs, and power can ever somehow make people love us, believe us, and want what we dream of.

There is a fire yet to come that will purify, warm, and make us bold. Like the fire that Moses found in a bush, it will not consume as much as make us holy. For that fire, for that love, we ought to pray.

Audio Available

325

Ordinary Time 21

8/26/2007

Isaiah 66: 18-21 Psalm 117 + Hebrews 12: 5-6, 11-13 + Luke 13: 22-30

Fr. Boyer

I performed a little unscientific experiment this past week.

I asked twelve children between the ages of nine and thirteen what it was that they wanted most out of life, and what it was that they feared most when making a decision. Now a couple of them messed up my survey by simply looking at me for a moment and then shrugging their shoulders and changing the subject. I guess they couldn't figure out what I wanted them to say, so they said nothing. But from the others, I got a variety of responses all of which left me somewhat stunned and amazed at how these children are growing up differently than I did.

I am sure that at their age had someone asked me what I wanted most out of life, I would have said: "I want to go to heaven." If they had asked what I feared most when making a decision, I would have said: "Going to hell." At their age, I was thinking about eternal life and all that sort of thing, and so were my friends. It was not just because of the sisters in my catholic schools either. It was because of my parents and the community of friends with which we lived. Although I have heard stories for ages about how the fear of hell scared boys and girls of my generation, I was never traumatized by after life prospects. Heaven and Hell were just apart of my universe. The project was to learn how to play the game of salvation.

What I confirmed by my experiment this week is that this game has been replaced by others, that the universe of many of our children does not seem to include either heaven or hell. It just isn't something they think about. My distress rises when I begin to wonder what it is they think about. "Hell" for them is a bad word you're not supposed to say until you're old enough. "Heaven" for too many of our children is a vague goal that may or may not follow being rich, famous, successful, and pretty.

Into that kind of thinking comes this odd question from an anonymous person Jesus meets on the way to Jerusalem. "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" From the way Luke handles this incident, it looks to me as though this question and questioner are an interruption. Perhaps something else was going on – perhaps Jesus was speaking of something else, and this guy runs up with a question out of the blue. None the less, it is a curious question raised as Jesus nears Jerusalem and the end of the Journey and the conclusion of his formation program for disciples.

In response to the question, Jesus either simply returns to what he was saying, or stuns everyone there with a clever story about crowds, doors, and a master who challenges accepted ideas about inclusion and exclusion. The story raises two important questions to ponder:

What is this strength required to enter the narrow door and

If eating and drinking in the company of Jesus (think Eucharist)

and listening to his words (think bible study) are not enough to get in,

what is? "I do not know where you are from" he says twice in this passage! Here is the real issue. In simple terms, what Jesus announces here on the way to Jerusalem is that it does not matter who you know when it comes to having a place in the heavenly banquet, but who you are. But of course, that assumes that someone is thinking about it getting to heaven which in our time might be even more an issue than how many will get there.

This Gospel on this late summer weekend might just serve to do that:

challenge and re direct our energies, our focus, and our goals in this life. I recognize in my own reflection, that the passion and youthful fervor of my childhood years is not what it used to be. Getting to heaven used to seem really important when I did not have to worry about getting to the grocery store or getting my tuition paid. Even when I began seminary studies, I used to think that my whole purpose in becoming a priest would be to get to heaven and bring along everyone I could find. There are moments now when I get distracted and think my whole purpose is keeping the rain out of this building or the debt payment made this month.

What has really happened in the meantime is a subtle shift. I have not been conscious of it, and I certainly have not been in control of it. It is not that I have become lax, nor have you necessarily. It is certainly not that we have lost religious focus even though we sometimes get confused about what is really important. Getting the love of heaven and the fear of hell back into my soul is something to think about, but I'm not sure that it is something I must do today. I still believe in the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. But they are not center stage and I am not obsessing about them. Perhaps what clarifies this best is a smart aleck quip made by a feisty psychologist who was asked the question: "Are you saved?" He said in response: "I am trying to figure out how to be spent." Here is the wisdom we may uncover within this Gospel.

Salvation flows from a life of self-giving: What we are, not who we know.

Trying to figure out how to give our lives to something bigger than our ego ambitions and petty schemes for getting rich and famous is the issue.

When we figure that out, the master of house will know where we come from.

Audio Available

326

Ordinary Time 22

9/2/2007

Sirach 3: 17-21, 30,31 + Psalm 68 + Hebrews 12: 18,19,22-24 + Luke 14: 1, 7-15

Fr. Boyer

Often called the "Gospel of Great Reversals",

Luke's Gospel stays true to form today.

The liturgy's first reading gives us the clue
that unfolds the virtue of discipleship we ponder
at this stop on the way to Jerusalem.

Getting closer to the end, Jesus gets more intense,
more pointed, more specific, and perhaps now raises the virtues
that are most important.

It's about humility today;

that virtue we love to admire in others and struggle to find in ourselves.

Perhaps the problem is that we so continually avoid truth.

We love to fool ourselves, and the more we hide the truth from others,
the more comfortable and safe often feel.

That behavior is obvious from the highest levels of government
to the most simple family homes.

In fact, it probably would never be tolerated at the level of government
if we were not already so skilled at hiding the truth at home.

Privacy is getting to be such a big thing with us
that I couldn't even find you in a hospital if you called for me
and I miss spelled your name at the information desk.

We will not practice this virtue by denying the truth.

The gifts we have are all real.

Truth demands that we recognize the giver of those gifts.

That truth demands that we put those gifts at the service of others
not for what we might gain; but rather for the sake of those others
and the glory of the one who has given.

So the first place to look for the perfect example of humility is God.

After all, what is "virtue"

except the most clear reflection of divine life and divine qualities.

The Son of God is the human example of the divine virtue of humility.

He refused to cling to his divine status.

He set aside every right and every shred of dignity.

He humbled himself to the point of washing the feet
of an ambitious, not too dependable group who followed him
seeking glory, power, and influence.

Finally, that action led to the greater act of humility: his death on a cross.

We gather here week after week under that reminder of humility
with the expectation that our own minds will be open to the possibility
of such humility toward one another.

To do so will put us at odds with worldly wisdom
which encourages ambition and assertiveness.
I am beginning to understand this better and better
in the latter half of my life,
and I am beginning to see how important it is for younger people
to learn this virtue early in life, and thereby saving themselves a lot of humiliation, disappointment, and
failure.

Humility is always about truth:
the truth that what most people seem to be admired for
is not really very admirable;
the truth that what most people look to for satisfaction
is not really very satisfying.
What is truly admirable is to be less concerned about being admired.
What is truly satisfying is to forego one's own satisfaction
and try to satisfy the needs of others.

Toward the end of this Gospel parable,
Jesus suggests where we might go to encounter the presence of God.
To the lowest place among the least is where we go.
To the poor, the weak, the crippled, the blind and outcast:
who according to Luke at the Blessed ones, not you and me.
They are the gifted, for they are a gift to us
by most closely taking on the image of Christ.
These are the ones who will bless and gift us,
not the other way around.
This kind of thinking takes us deeply
into the mystery revealed in the Gospel of Great Reversals.
What Luke suggests
is that more is required than a check in the mail or a hand-out.
Hospitality is the exercise of this virtue
and in the ancient language of this Gospel,
Hospitality means "love of a stranger."
This is a big challenge to us in an age of border security
and vicious immigration laws.
When we keep the needy, the poor, the helpless away from us,
we may be doing more than we think,
and we shall be far from the truth
and a long way from being humble.

Audio Available

327

Ordinary Time 23

9/9/2007

Wisdom 9:13-18 + Psalm 90 + Philemon 9,10,12,17 + Luke 14:25-33

Fr Boyer

It is important to notice that these words are addressed
not to the disciples who have been in formation
along the way to Jerusalem;
but to "the people" who are following along.

As I said last week, the journey is near the end.

There is a sense of heightened intensity.

If anyone in that crowd is even thinking of discipleship as a way of life,
Jesus makes it clear that anytime requirements of allegiance to Jesus
collide with any other loyalties or commitments,
God's royal right to rule prevails.

A shift of loyalties is a mark of discipleship.

Blood lines and that kind of family relationship
is not as important for true disciples.

There is a new family found in the company
of those who do the will of God.

The call to carry one's cross is not counsel to put up with life's problems.

It is a wake up call to would-be disciples,
that their lives will know the same rejection, mockery, abandonment,
misunderstanding, and humiliation that simply goes with discipleship.

To make certain that we understand that this message
is directed to us, Luke uses two parables about people like us:
people with resources, people rich, like us here in Norman.

He would have us understand
that entering into the community of disciples
is not like joining a health club or a country club.

This is not an entertainment complex,
where we gather when we feel like it.

This assembly does not come together to feel good
nor have our comfortable lifestyles affirmed.

The demands of Jesus cannot and must not be spiritualized away.

They are real, concrete, specific, and hard.

It means: to be a disciple of Jesus
you must be willing to let go of what you value the most.

Then he gives three examples;

familial connections

which for many probably mean power and security;

possessions

which may or may not be material goods;

and one's own life

which may well mean one's life-style with all of its comforts, pleasures, distractions, and entertainments.

For you and me, this Gospel boils down to this:

If we want to take Jesus seriously instead of just tagging along, it's going to take DESIRE.

It cannot come from a desire to look good, feel good, or even a desire to save our souls. It simply must come from love.

We will have to love Jesus more than anyone else or anything else, and that kind of love will make any sacrifice seem easy.

It is also going to require KNOWLEDGE.

We have to know what we are getting into, so it means a little study, a lot of listening, some planning, and a thirst of knowledge.

It is also going to take COMMITMENT.

No quitting when it gets tough, no whining, no going back is allowed.

So at this point in the journey to Jerusalem, we might decide, calculate, or make up our minds if we want to go on. What's it going to be for us?

Audio Available

328

Ordinary Time 24

9/16/2007

Exodus 32:7-11, 13, 14 + Psalm 5 + 1 Timothy 1: 12-17 + Luke 15:1-32

Fr. Boyer

A couple of weeks ago, when I settled down with this Gospel reading, my first thought was to focus on the first two of the three parables.

After all, we heard the third parable on a Sunday this past Lent.

It also struck me that using the shorter option for the Gospel would jolt Deacon Byron since he knows without my saying so that I always prefer the longer option.

You can never get enough of a good thing, even the Good News!

Then some time passed and I continued to look at the whole text and consider who was being addressed with these parables.

It is the good son.

It is the Scribes and Pharisees, the good law abiding, faithful ones who are being told these stories.

It is you and me, the people who made Mass attendance the priority of the weekend who are hearing this message.

So I decided we had better keep it all together and not skip the last story which brings it all home.

Back away from the specific details for a minute, and these parables start to talk about the "in" group and the "out group.

That is how Chapter Fifteen starts, and that is how it ends.

There is an "in group" who are usually at the table and welcome.

There is an "out group" not so welcome or sometimes absent.

In this biblical language, there are tax collectors and sinners:

they are the "out group."

Then there are the righteous: (Scribes and Pharisees or the good son) who are the "in group."

Isn't that the way it is most of the time in our lives.

Whether it's an issue of ideology, politics, religion, race, language, culture, or simply who sits where in the school cafeteria.

We have our "in groups" and "the others."

The Jesus of this Gospel confronts that business.

God did not make things this way at the beginning.

This kind of dis-unity is not in the divine plan of things,

and Jesus has come to restore what is lost, heal what is broken,

and unite what is divided. God's will is Unity.

Think about the numbers in this chapter for just a minute.

One Hundred is a whole number and so is ten.

The numbers in ancient writings are often symbolic and the use of them reinforces images and the message.

The flock has 100 sheep: but one is missing.

Something is wrong here. There are ten coins; but one gets lost.
The Shepherd must have that wholeness.
The unity must be restored no matter what the cost.
The woman must have the whole set of ten,
so everything stops until it gets back together.
What unites them is joy from the realization that things are the way they were meant to be. Creation is fulfilled. God's will is satisfied.
Things are good.

In the face of this however, something in our age makes us shrug
and scoff at such insistence on wholeness.
Our practical minds make no sense of looking for one when you have 99,
or think it silly to waste precious oil to find one coin when you still have 9.
Lighting the oil lamp probably cost more than the value of the coin!
An imperfect world has made us too comfortable with imperfection.
We've just decided that loss is inevitable, and we don't bother about it.
The truth of loss has impressed us too much and taught us to accommodate too quickly.
We have become numb to the pain of missing what was once part of our identity. We accept this as the normal way of things, but Jesus is not so resigned. He does not settle for this, and neither should we.

Into this comes parable three and a contrast of behavior in the face of loss. We have a choice in the face of our losses: anxious hope waiting for a reunion and wanting to miss no opportunity for it; or a smug and arrogant dismissal that just accepts the broken way things are without any desire to make it otherwise. There is nothing more crushing than simply writing someone off with the comment: "They'll always be that way." Nothing more hopeless than opting out of life by simply declaring: "That's just the way it is."

Jesus was not so resigned, and neither may his disciples be. If God desires unity, so must we. Until we do, there will be no Joy and no celebration that affirms the victory of God's Royal Reign. If the finding of one makes the ninety-nine and the nine whole, then it is not just the good fortune of a shepherd or a woman. We must all gather. When sheep and coins are together neighbors and friends are brought in. Getting back what we have lost is our project. Those who are "out" must be brought "in". It is the only way, it is God's way and God's plan for creation. Scribes and Pharisees couldn't get it. Too worried about being or staying part of the "in group" they never reached out or made room for others. It cannot be so for us.

Audio Available

329

Ordinary Time 25

9/23/2007

Amos 8: 4-7 + Psalm 113 + 1 Timothy 2: 1-8 + Luke 16: 1-13

Fr Boyer

As I sat for several days with these verses from Luke 16,
the G-8 Summit was concluding in Australia,
and the media was highlighting international concern for the earth.
Global warming seemed to weave its way
in and out of every other issue.

While there are some who insist the whole matter
is simply a media event, there are others who prefer to believe
that this is all just a matter of climate cycles;
but they are growing fewer in number and a bit less insistent in the face of scientific facts and reports,
and our growing realization
that as usual, the biggest impact
will be felt by the most helpless and poorest of peoples.

The statistics are staggering and disturbing.

Most disturbing of all to me is that the underlying cause of global warming is the cooling of the human
heart.

What else can account for the squandering of an environment that belongs to every living being.

What else can account for our apathy toward the well-being of others.

Even scientists are beginning to speak about
a "moral obligation" to care for the earth.

If scientists are concerned about the morality of human decisions,
how much more should disciple of Jesus Christ
have this concern for practicing good stewardship
not only of the earth, but for all who live on it.

These good stewards would be the "children of light"
spoken of in this Gospel.

The complexity of this parable makes it difficult to be absolutely certain as to what specific point Jesus is
making. The reversals are surprising. The ending is incomplete since we have no idea how things work
out for this steward or for the "master." The parallel between Jesus and his works of mercy and this
debt-reducing steward is interesting; but this dodges the issues of Stewardship that emerge boldly from
this text.

How Jesus used the parable is not clear.

What Luke was doing with the parable is complex.

What we do with it is another thing altogether.

Spoken in this community in the early fall of 2007,
the parable raises some troubling issues as we hear of a shrewd
steward who chose to serve his own needs rather than the interests of his employer.

Proclaimed here and now, this parable is story about us,
busy resourceful stewards whose track record in terms of the resources we have at hand isn't anything
to brag about;
and God the master who may at any moment

decide to call for an audit.

We are beginning to wake up to the fact that some of our resources are not unlimited, and the supplies are running low.

We like to talk these days about “rights”, and usually about our own.

We talk about the right to life, but we too often limit that to questions of reproduction, war, or capital punishment.

There is also a right to eat, to be clothed, to be sheltered, and to be nourished by the beauty of this world of which we are a part.

We don't seem to ask any questions about how much and what quality of food we have a right to when others do not eat.

How many changes of clothing do we need when others who have a right to be clothed go naked?

How big a home do we have a right to when there more of us with no homes on this earth?

Our consumer society suggests we have a right to everything we can earn. But is that true? Our religious tradition raises some objection to this thinking and the behavior that comes from it. In a world of limited resources, how much do we have a right to?

The man in today's reading is not condemned because of his economic privilege but because he used it only for his own advantage.

Children of the Light are more than insatiable consumers.

Our value is not found in the measure of our possessions.

It is in the quality of our relationships, in particular in our relationships with our deprived brothers and sisters.

We are not called to disown the world because this world is where we belong right now. We are called to live in it gently, using what we need and sharing all we can. We are after all only stewards of the things we have. We will take none of it with us into the next life. We have not earned anything, because we did not call ourselves into this life nor give ourselves any of the opportunities that have come our way.

For the second Sunday in a row, the word “squander” appears in the Gospel. Last week an inheritance was squandered. This week the Master's property is squandered. Both men ask the same question which perhaps we might ask ourselves: “What shall I do?”

Audio Available

330

Ordinary Time 23

9/9/2007

Wisdom 9:13-18 + Psalm 90 + Philemon 9,10,12,17 + Luke 14:25-33

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

331

Ordinary Time 26

9/30/2007

Amos 6: 1, 4-7 + Psalm 146 + 1 Timothy 6: 11-16 + Luke 16: 19-31

Fr Boyer

As the "Gospel of Radical Reversals" continues
there are some disturbing revelations:

The time before death is the time of repentance.

The time after death is the time of consequences.

Now is that just a "matter of fact" statement
that leaves you to shrug and say:

Oh yeah, I know that?

Or is it a scare tactic that might mildly disturb
two or three of the 1300 people who will be here this weekend?

But we live with threats of danger these days,
and the consequence of that is the hardening of our hearts.

It's curious to me that one guy with explosives in his shoe
can cause millions of people to walk through airports
all over the world barefooted years after.

This parable story is not about the after-life.

What is said about the after-life is said as a commentary
on what is happening on this side of death.

The point is: the way the world works is not the way God works.

Our social arrangements are not in agreement with God's plan or will.

Looking upon riches as a blessing is wrong.

We need to stop thinking that way. It is dangerous.

Looking around at all that we have should make us shudder
and wonder: "What for?"

Riches are a responsibility, not a blessing.

They carry with them the obligation of imitating God's behavior
which is seen in the after-life scene of the story.

The real plan of God is to rearrange the goods of the earth
so that everyone shares in them.

God's will does not support inequality,
and getting that point is a serious move toward the Kingdom of God.

Abraham (a God figure) thinks that the rich man
should have known that all along.

What he is really saying to that rich man is:

"What is it you don't understand here?"

You lived a life of luxury. You ignored Moses and the prophets.

You paid no attention to the needs of the poor
while you knew they were there.

In fact, you even knew his name!"

Now you act surprised and want someone to go to your brothers.

You still don't get it!
They are sitting in the same church (synagogue) you sat in.
They hear the same readings and revelations of God's will.
You think that they need something more spectacular.
But that's not the point.
If like you they pay no attention to the Word of God,
they will not pay attention to someone who comes from the dead.
The problem is not that they don't know.
The problem is they know and yet do not care.
They live with hard hearts and drink their wine.
Nothing gets to them, and their self imposed isolation is their destiny."

My brothers and sisters; there are no excuses.
Something more is not needed for us to change.
There is enough already,
unless it is a better understanding of God's Word and Will.
Bringing Abraham and Lazarus together is our goal and our mission.
Translating this spiritual truth into social behavior
is what we are doing as disciples of Jesus and why we are here.

On one side of the door, a rich person feasts.
On the other side of the door, Lazarus starves.
Who holds the key?
Remember, doors are locked from the inside.

Audio Available

332
Ordinary Time 18
8/5/2007

Fr. Aloishus

Audio Available

333

Ordinary Time 27

10/7/2007

Habakkuk 1:2-3;22: 2-4 + Psalm 95 + 2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14 + Luke 17:5-10

Fr. Boyer

There is something about us all
that always leads us to think that more is better
and that what we have is not enough.
That was the problem with the disciples in this Gospel story.
These are the same disciples who when told
to feed a crowd with five loaves and two fish
insisted that they did not have enough.
Instead of working with what they had,
they thought they needed something from the outside:
something more, something else, and something extra ordinary.
But Jesus always sees more in his followers
than they see in themselves,
and herein lies the message of this Gospel.

These disciples seem interested in quantity
while Jesus is concerned with quality
Very little faith is needed to accomplish extraordinary feats.
There has been a great deal of interest and a lot of conversation
in the media recently over some revelations about Mother Theresa
and her confession of weak and struggling faith.
What better example is there for this Gospel than the life of this little woman who thought she had
doubts and weak faith?

Living in faith is about the obligation of service
about the obligation that come with gifts.
A believer is invited continually to move deeper and deeper
into the being of the Giver, becoming what they are intended to be
and doing what they are intended to do,
making the power of that gift visible in their work and their being.
This is what Jesus is teaching about here:
the obligations of the one in service,
not about the responsibilities of the one being served.

Getting the whole picture here challenges any idea of rewards
and some kind of bonus for living as faithful disciples of Jesus.
We are the ones to whom faith has been given.
Therefore we are the ones from whom faithful service is expected.
We are sent to plow the field, tend the sheep and serve the table.

There are no special favors for those who fulfill their duty.
There is no "extra credit" when they do what it is expected.
This kind of thinking is foreign to the life in the Kingdom of God.

We are simply being what we are meant to be
and doing what they have been empowered to do by their faith.

The call to faith that Christ gives to us in these readings
is not a promise of a life made free of challenges,
obstacles, and burdens by the power of God.

It is not a promise of life that always makes sense
that is always marked by clear purpose and satisfaction.

Rather, it is a call to keep at it, even when there is mystery,
even when life does not make sense.

It is a promise that precisely in that perseverance is the power of God. The power of God, after all,
doesn't always have to feel divine in order to be so.

Faith works.

It eases burdens, overcomes challenges, it gives life.

Faith works, and often enough it is really the only thing that does.

"Faith" in Scriptures really means something more like loyalty.

Faith changes nothing outside of us. It changes everything inside of us.

Faith is not about unaided human powers.

It is about human abilities in league with divine intentions and activity.

The astonishing power of Jesus is manifest not in spectacular displays of supernatural power, but in
every act of forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, justice, and peacemaking this is far more impressive
than transplanting trees into the sea!

This gospel gives hope to those who feel it is impossible to confront seemingly insurmountable obstacles
posed by systems of injustice. People of faith who "stir into flame" the gifts God has given working
together to eradicate those tangled roots of injustice, are doing exactly what they are commanded to
do, no more, no less.

It is by grace and by faith that such efforts can succeed.

It's like this:

We are under orders of God to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Looking for rewards and thanks is not appropriate because it will continue the false idea that we are
doing something beyond the ordinary and so have to be acknowledged and rewarded.

We do not need more. We need confidence in what we have.

What this simply means is: service as usual. If we do not know what we have, we cannot use it to make
happen what we want to make happen.

He kept telling people they had the tools to live in the Kingdom of God.

Mustard sized faith is enough. Why do we always want more?

Audio Available

334
Ordinary Time 28
10/14/2007

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

335

Ordinary Time 29

10/21/2007

Exodus 17:8-13 + Psalm 121 + 1 Timothy 3:14-4:2 + Luke 18:1-8

Fr. Boyer

A rich and wonderful parable comes to us as we near the end of the journey to Jerusalem. We get a vivid picture of two opposing characters.

It is easy to fall into pious stereotypes here:

the judge is God, and the widow is you and me;

or, pray long enough and hard enough for anything, and you'll get it.

There are some details here that will not allow that thinking.

To begin with, the character of the judge is hardly a God-like figure.

His own self-description will not bear that comparison.

This judge does not act right.

His internal dialogue reveals some very unpleasant things about him.

The final incongruity is even a bit humorous.

He's a afraid of a black – eye!

The word Luke uses for what the judge fears is a boxing term that refers to a black eye!

In the end, this guy is really afraid of being found out.

He is afraid of others seeing that a little old lady beat him up!

What ultimately sways him is a consideration of what others will think.

This is hardly God-like behavior.

Then, what about her? She is not the typical widow in Israel either.

They are weak, powerless, helpless, and voiceless.

They have no way to appeal to the law only men do that.

She is anything but the stereotype of a widow.

She is strong, steady, and a voice of justice that will not be silenced.

So all those first glance expectations

fail to lead us into the heart of this parable.

Remember, Luke is the Gospel of great reversals.

So, turn it all around and something else starts to be revealed here.

It is not about prayer or persistence in prayer. It is about Justice.

The Judge is not a figure of God, the widow is.

The parable is left open ended – leaving us to wrestle with its meaning.

We would like to identify with the widow.

It is a much more comfortable position and role,

but I don't think God will give up that position to us.

When this parable is proclaimed in this age,

we are the ones who in control of justice.

We cannot trivialize this parable and its roles to ease our responsibility.

Justice is in our hands, and we know only too well how it has been going.

The powerful and the rich have access.

The voiceless are just that, and the poor rarely get the justice that is theirs.

It is not just a matter of legal justice either.

It is a matter of access to education, to opportunities, to jobs, food and housing, health care, peace and security.

This story tells us about God.

It reveals God's insistence, persistence and God's demands

because God, this widow, and everyone like her are one and the same.

God's identity with the poor has not gone away since the beginning of the Incarnation in Bethlehem.

When the widow is seen as a god-like figure, then the behavior of the widow becomes god-like behavior for a people of God.

There is also an important comment on the methods to be used in accomplishing a just end. The ludicrous image of a powerful judge fearing a seemingly helpless widow may be Jesus' wry comment on the futility of resorting to violence in the work of justice.

This message receives its fullest force in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His seeming helplessness in the face of his executioners is transformed into the very defeat of the powers of sin and death. Followers of Jesus are invited to take up this same stance:

to draw on the power of apparent weakness to overcome death-dealing powers.

Finally, do not forget that Luke is always the Gospel of Women. They figure prominently in every chapter. In a culture that measures power in terms of acquisition of wealth, this parable underscores the power of weakness. It shows that the initiative in seeking justice comes from the one who has been wronged, and her power is in raising her voice day after day after day. The parable portrays not violence, but persistence in naming and confronting injustice as the means to accomplish righteousness.

Further, she can encourage those who are intimidated at the enormity of the challenge in dismantling interlocking systems of racism, sexism, militarism, and economic imbalance. A seemingly helpless widow has more power than a corrupt judge.

When Jesus wonders aloud in the last verse of today's Gospel if he will find faith on the earth at his return, the parable would lead us to think the "faith he longs for is really "justice." Is he going to find it is the question this parable raises?

For those of us responsible for Justice, there is a message here.

Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 30

10/28/2007

Sirach 35:12-13,16-18 + Psalm 34 + 2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18 + Luke 18:9-14

Fr. Boyer

This parable brings to a close the Journey to Jerusalem.

One more time, Luke uses two very opposite characters to pull a reversal.

One of these men has every right and reason to be there.

The other because of his frequent contact with Romans and Gentiles ought not be there because of his uncleanness.

None the less, there they are one in the front, one in the back.

By now, we should not be surprised

by the reversals so common in Luke's Gospel!

The prayer of the Pharisee seems to be addressing God,
but he's really talking to himself. The pronoun "I" is repeated four times!

He is the center of his prayer.

He is more interested in the tax collector in back than in God.

In contrast, just as with last week's Judge and Widow,
there in the back is the Pharisee's opposite.

He takes no note of anyone else,

and his prayer acknowledges only a merciful God

and his own unworthiness.

Now remember, the culture who first heard this parable
would have totally identified with the good, pious, law-abiding Pharisee.

For those first listeners, this is a stunning reversal

as Jesus concludes the story scorning the good guy

and praising the bad guy. This story turns everything upside down.

But maybe there is more here than we know.

Just suppose on the way to the Temple that morning the Pharisee took groceries to a family where no one had a job,

stopped to see someone recently left alone by the death of a spouse,

and picked up a street person and took them to a shelter,

leaving some cash to help feed them.

Suppose at the same time,

the Publican on his way to the temple evicted a single parent from some of his rental property because they were late on rent, had a huge breakfast and left no tip after being rude and demanding to the server,

and on the way into the Temple dropped in only some loose change from his pocket at the offering plate.

With these considerations first impressions begin to fail,
as well they should. The issue here is the comparison.

This is that trap in the story that catches us by surprise

and teaches us a lesson.

It was a surprise for those who first heard this story from Jesus too.
A surprise twist leaves us thinking
and that is the whole point of parable telling.

Where the prayer of the Pharisee goes wrong is not in thanking God or acknowledging what he has become by God's grace;
but in comparing himself to another. It is the word: "Like" that betrays something out of order. With that word, he crosses the line from gratitude to comparison. It is a subtle difference, but we know how it feels.

Suppose we could listen in to the prayers of some who are here this morning:

"Thank God I am not like that one over there who sings off key."

"Thank God I am not like that liberal who is destroying the church."

"Thank God I am not like those lazy people on welfare stealing my reluctant tax money."

You see, it is just like the Temple scene,

For all his faults, the Publican at least has the integrity to look only at himself. He knew who he was. He never said, "I'm sorry I am not as good as or "like" the Pharisee.

It does not matter how we compare in the end.

What matters is that we know ourselves and who we really are within.

Because it is God who saves, and God is after us all.

The Publican went home "justified." Not because he went to the Temple,

not because his prayer was better than someone else's. He went home justified because he knew that he could not justify himself, and he was honest about his imperfect self.

We have no idea where the Pharisee went. Perhaps he went on trying to justify himself or impress God further by other good deeds so that God might not let anything bad happen to him. That's the way it often goes with that kind of prayer and attitude --

a sort "Divine Bribery" that will see faith and prayer collapse if some tragedy occurs. They think, after all, "I've been so good. I've done so much. How could God do this to me?"

Wrong thinking here. Jesus might well have had the same thoughts if His prayer and relationship to God had gone that way.

Our clue to the understanding of this parable comes in the First reading from Sirach. "The Lord is a God of justice, who knows no favorites....."

Who we are in the sight of God has nothing to do with anyone else.

God cannot, will not, and does compare us to one another.

But God will look for signs of His Son in us.

Audio Available

337

All Saints Day

11/1/2007

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14 + Psalm 24 + 1 John 3: 1-3 + Matthew 5: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

These Gospel verses could easily be published under a new title,
and I can imagine the cover:

it would be yellow with black print running diagonally across the page.

If you are a browser of book stores,
that image might make you think of a familiar cover design
with many specific titles.

This one would be: Sanctity for Dummies!

That is all it really is – “A Smart Guide”, or “Sanctity Made Simple.”

It is a portrait of what we shall be when we finally decide
to become what God has made us to become:

poor in spirit...meek...and merciful;

hungry and thirsty righteousness,

clean of heart and makers of peace.

“Lord, this is the people that longs to
see your face.” says our Psalm today.

This is the people that want to be saints.

The more I have thought about this,

and the more years I’ve celebrated this feast,

I have begun to see something more here than that individualistic sanctity

promoted by the Litany of the Saints and our tradition of great stories about extra ordinary heroism and
courage.

I’ve come to conclusion that becoming a saint by alone is no big deal.

It’s easy to be holy by yourself.

Anybody can probably pull off a good “saint” routine if left alone.

What really is remarkable is becoming a saint in a community, in a family,
in a relationship. Now that is tough.

It’s a whole new proposition when we work to live graciously with a community of people practicing the
disciplines of fidelity, mercy, forgiveness and blessing those who mess with your life.

The most creditable miracle I see these days is a community of Christians

who assemble regularly, know themselves as the body of Christ,

and suffer with one another patiently, kindly, and gently.

Perhaps the real movement to holiness and sanctity in our lives comes from learning to live together in
peace with other flawed people.

After all sanctity is not an accumulation of merit like frequent flier miles on a credit card.

It is gift that comes to us in Baptism lived, celebrated, and acknowledged in a holy communion of lives
that nourish, support, and encourage each other to become what God has created us to be.

Audio Available

338

Ordinary Time 31

11/4/2007

Wisdom 11:22-12:2 + Psalms 145 + 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2 + Luke 19: 1-10

Fr. Boyer

Like so many of the stories in Luke's Gospel, there is a parallel.

Luke seems to like things pairs, and most of his characters have an "opposite" match somewhere in the Gospel.

It's all part of his "great reversal" theme,
and Zacchaeus is no exception.

Earlier, another rich person has come up to see Jesus,
and he goes away sad.

This time, a rich man comes to see Jesus,
and he ends up joyful.

The problem Zacchaeus has is the "crowd".

Because of them, he can't "see" Jesus.

But be careful, Luke is not talking about a "sighting" here.

That is not Zacchaeus wants.

Think about how we use the word "see" a little bit more.

Sometimes we say: "I'm going to see the doctor."

That's the point here - that is what Zacchaeus wants.

He wants to understand and be understood by Jesus.

He wants a relationship, now a pair of binoculars.

His problem is not his eyes nor his physical stature.

His problem is the crowd!

They are in the way - not physically, but personally.

They want sightings, they want to watch, they grumble and mumber,
they do not enter into a relationship.

Zacchaeus wants none of that stuff,

but because of the crowd and their behavior and the things they say, and their expectations, he is needs
to get above them - he needs to "get over" them.

Think about the images here, not the literal details.

Zacchaeus has enough desire, enough willingness, enough creativity to do just that.

He is willing to look silly, be laughed at or ridiculed because of his desire to have a relationship that
Jesus; and he gets what he wants and more.

So does Jesus. He gets what he wants and more.

There are people with intense desire here:

Jesus, who says: "I MUST stay at your house today." This is strong language.

He is not asking for an invitation. He expressing something he MUST do.

Zacchaeus comes down QUICKLY and received him with JOY.

Both of these men have their deepest most urgent longings satisfied,
and the consequence if Joy for both of them.

Remember, in the parallel story of a different rich man,

Jesus was saddened as the man went away with eyes cast down

for he could not do what Jesus asked of him.

There is another wonderful little but important thing happening here worth observation and reflection.

When Jesus shows up at dinner or at someone's house, he is never the guest; but always becomes the host.

He feeds, nourishes, serves, and always, he becomes the host.

It happens at Cana in Galilee with wine and water.

It happens in the home of Martha and Mary.

It happens in home of a Roman Centurion, in the home of a Pharisee, and now in the home of Zachariah.

The divine guest becomes the divine host prefiguring the heavenly banquet.

He invites Zacchaeus into his life, into the intimacy of his friendship.

This invitation is extended to us all, my friends.

Would that the same sense of urgency could move us to do the same, to ignore the crowds of this world and their superficial response to Jesus and get above it all and experience the same Joy.

What Luke says to us on this autumn Sunday is that Jesus loves us not because we are particularly holy, pure, and good, but precisely because we are not.

There is on God's part through Jesus, an obligation, a desire, an urgent longing to stay in your house.

The response God's want and God is anxious to have is not one that is simply spiritual, but one that radically changes our behavior, that is marked by extraordinary generosity, and the freedom to give away, let go of, and make amends for harm done in our past.

One rich man in Lukes Gospel could do it and lived with Joy.

The other went away sad for his riches were many.

Which one is going to be our story?

No Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 31
11/4/2007

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

340

Ordinary Time 32

11/11/2007

Maccabees 7:1-2,9-14 + Psalm 17 + 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5 + Luke 20: 27-38

Fr. Boyer

He is in Jerusalem now, and he has already cleansed the Temple.

Jesus is in a no-win conversation, and anyone who has been the target for religious questions raised by persons who had no intention of being influenced by the answers can sense the frustration.

These Sadducees were the ultimate right-wing religious fanatics.

They only believed and gave authority to the first five books of the Old Testament: the Pentateuch.

They did not ask this question to get an answer or have a conversation.

They raised the issue to bully Jesus with their conviction.

They wanted to argue, to embarrass, and perhaps, turn people against Jesus.

There attitude gets no response from Jesus only their question.

To understand the answer, we must understand the culture.

Marriage at that time was not about love, affection or romance.

It was a simple political/economic system concerned with property accumulation and population growth.

Population growth is the issue addressed in the Book of Deuteronomy requiring the brother of a deceased man to take the widow and her children into his care so as to continue the family line.

The scenario proposed by the Sadducees is of course exaggerated to the point of being silly, and Jesus ignores that.

He simply sticks with logic and avoids being embarrassed by their proposition.

On the second point, Jesus stays within their accepted scriptures reminding them that their own scriptures speak of the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" who must somehow be alive since the same scriptures refer to God as a "God of the living", not a God of the dead. At this point, their trap collapses by the words of their own accepted authority.

Yet the point Jesus makes is not just for the Sadducees, it is for all who are listening.

What he reveals or teaches here is that there is a radical difference between the present life and the resurrection;

but because of God and within God, there is some continuity.

In other words, life after death is so different that procreation will not be necessary.

He is not saying that there will be no relationships; but that the primary relationship will be with God and in God and all other relationships will be found in God.

This becomes a proposal for ordering our relationships now.

Perhaps what Jesus suggests is that the more God is a part of a relationship, the closer that relationship is to the divine plan

that comes to fulfillment in heaven.

When earlier in his teaching Jesus raised questions about how much his disciples should worry about material possessions, he proposed that we consider what of those possessions we would take with us after death.

It was a radical way of questioning values and how we look upon the stuff we gather up and keep in our garages, attics and storage facilities. Now he goes one step further raising a question about our relationships.

He proposes that one relationship will carry over through death:
our relationship with God.

Getting that point calls into question how we relate to one another,
and what we might seek, expect, and find in our human relationships.

The heart of what is revealed here is that belief in the resurrection is not the same as the conviction that the soul is immortal.

On this point we divert from religions that believe in reincarnation because they believe in immortality but not in resurrection.

Our belief in resurrection is grounded upon the concept of covenant,
which claims that God has established a relationship with human beings.

The question is this: does physical death end that relationship,
or is God's desire to keep the covenant stronger?

The tradition in the Bible is that God's desire is stronger than death.

Consequently, for you and me, this covenant holds our hope for resurrection. Only one relationship holds that promise.

Other relationships we have in this life must lead us into the covenant
which is why love is such an indispensable issue.

Casual sex, narcissistic relationships, or the insincere manipulation of another for the sake of profit or fame does not lead us into covenant.

Only sacrificial love, takes us there, and these are the relationships that should matter and be the focus of our attention and the source of our hope.

Our relationships are what we shall take with us into God, nothing else.

Relationships are what we must work for, nothing else.

A family that suffers the absence of someone because they are working all the time is very poor no matter what the earned income.

This Gospel on a November Sunday simply calls into question the quality of our relationships with one another and how those relationships lead us to God.

Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 33

11/18/2007

Malachi 3:19-20 + Psalm 98 + 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 + Luke 21: 5-19

Fr. Boyer

This Gospel is not about the future

even though that might make it more interesting and entertaining.

Prediction of the future has always drawn a crowd.

We are the ones being addressed here.

We are the ones who are living through times of trial, catastrophe, disasters, betrayals, war and natural disasters.

Jesus speaks to us just as plainly and just as clearly as he did to those in Luke's community who witnessed their own disasters, betrayals, wars, and catastrophes.

It is not a matter of when are things going to come.

They already have.

It is a matter of how we shall face them

and what shall become of us because of them.

To this issue Jesus speaks.

It seems to me that there are only three options:

denial, fear, and faithful perseverance.

We all know what happens to people who are in denial.

They end up being destroyed by the very thing they will not name.

We know what happens to people who give way to fear.

Many have in these days. The culture of fear is all around us.

Politicians are using with great skill.

Scare us badly enough and we will surrender our most treasured principals and compromise our very liberty.

Neither of these two options is consistent with Gospel life.

Neither of these two options will save us from anything.

In fact, they are both ultimately destructive.

A culture of denial and a culture of fear are toxic to the soul as well as to the body.

The only option is what Jesus Christ offers us.

Age after age on this earth has had a time of crises.

Every one of us has or will have it as well.

This room is full of people whose lives bear the marks of suffering, disappointment, tragedy, loss, death, sickness, and pain.

Some can tell stories of family member who have betrayed them, who have laughed at them, and left them.

Some have stories of disease, sudden death, tornados, fires, and tragic accidents.

An absurd war tears apart families,

leaves men and women broken and scared for life.

It has wrought economic chaos for the future

and it threatens our life style more than any terrorist.

The fearful and those in denial

just keep going passing on the debt to our children's children.

What to do, and what shall we become is the question raised by the Gospel.

Jesus gives the answer.

Luke has said it from the first spoken words of his Gospel.

Fear not.

All of these things are signs that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

We are living already in the end time if we stand firm, hold to faith,
and let nothing tear us from one another and from Christ.

Human suffering and even human sin can be a privileged time
for renewal, reflection, and new directions that may give birth to the hope
that Malachi has spoken of.

A new hope that "There will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.

Whether we face a terrorist, a dreaded diagnosis, loss of a loved one, some natural disaster that takes
everything we own, the loss of our job, or anything else this world can throw at us, we know what we
must do, and what we must become.

Persevere in faith, in hope, in charity.

Become like Christ in order to share in His victory.

This Gospel then is about today, not a prediction of the future,
so the order of the day is perseverance with which we shall secure our lives.

No Audio Available

342
Feast of Christ the King
11/25/2007

Fr. Leven

Audio Available

343

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2007

Genesis 3:9-15,20 + Psalm 98 + Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12 + Luke 1:26-38

Fr. Boyer

It has taken me a life time to figure this out;

this matter of Adam and Eve and this business of sin and redemption.

I'm not sure if I am just slow to process things

or have simply had to live sixty-five years to get it;

but I finally am getting to the heart of matter here.

These two figures from the beginning:

the problem with them is that they simply never said "I'm sorry."

When asked the question: "Why did you do it?"

The blame started. She blamed the snake. Adam blamed her.

All they needed to say was: "I don't know. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was foolish, and it was wrong."

All they needed to say was: "I did it. I'm sorry."

Confronted by God after their sin, they were unable to admit it.

Had they simply admitted their sin,

human history may have been different,

and I am beginning to believe that this is the point of the story

the writer of Genesis wanted to share with us.

The tragedy of blame, the foolishness of hiding the truth,

and the consequence of a failure to cry out for redemption and forgiveness.

The refusal to admit that we sin begins a lie

that gets retold and retold again and again

until we begin to believe it ourselves.

We rationalize, make up excuses, project blame,

use psychology and sociology to justify our behavior.

All the while it's lie.

This ability and easy way of not admitting our sin

is the greatest of all temptations that faces us.

Failure to admit weaknesses and acknowledge our sin as sin

is infinitely more damaging than the weakness and sin itself.

Failure in self honesty is the start of the sin against the Holy Spirit,

the only sin that cannot be forgiven.

We are all familiar with the warning Christ gave against the one sin that cannot be forgiven: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

That sin is simply lying to oneself until one become so warped

that the lie is believed.

Falsehood become truth.

The reason this sin cannot be forgiven is not that God refuses,

but because the person no longer sees the need to be forgiven.

Living in darkness is seen as living in light;

sin is seen as grace;

perversion as virtue.

This person would not accept forgiveness if it were offered,
because to do so would mean admitting sinfulness and the need for redemption.

It always begins with the rationalization and the failure to admit sin,
and everything in this world supports that way of getting off the hook,
of making ourselves look good by denying our weakness and sin.

We see this everywhere, and for us Catholics, the most obvious sign
is our tendency to avoid Confession of all kinds.

It means an inability to take personal responsibility for our own unhappiness,
and in our tendency not to admit our moral misery.

It shows up in our inability to be contrite in confession
in church and every where else.

What does all this have to do with the Immaculate Conception you might ask about now in the middle of
this homily.

My thoughts have gone this way because this feast declares that only one of us human beings is without
sin: that is the Immaculate Conception. Only one.

The point of celebrating Mary's sinlessness
is to move honestly toward admitting our own sinfulness.

She stands before us in her human perfection
so that we might see our human imperfection
and know what to do about it because of her Son.

Only the sinner can be saved.

Only those who say: "I am sorry." or "Forgive me."
can ever hope to hear the angel's message: "Fear not."
and become "full of grace."

But that is what He came to bring us: grace and a life without fear.

Audio Available

344

Advent 2

12/9/2007

Isaiah 11: 1-10 + Psalm 72 + Romans 15: 4-9 + Matthew 3: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

I love the way Matthew introduces John the Baptist! He just appears, suddenly out of nowhere. It suggests mystery and leads us out of the ordinary and into wonder. You get a sense that something is up, some mystery is about to begin. The setting for this mystery is itself a place of wonder and wildness: the desert.

Everything about this scene recalls Israel's past: the clothing, the diet, the setting.

Prophets and Passover are the stuff of this image and message. Something new is at hand, but only for those who themselves are new.

His words are shouted as a challenge to what is old with a promise for those who will turn around from old ways. Pharisees and Sadducees emerge as the old, and they are finished. Gone is privilege and the security of law-keeping. Something new is happening.

A new age, a future that fulfills every prophet's dream, and everyone's hope;

but the way into that future is not the way of the present. Those who will be part of that future will have to turn around. They will turn their back on the present and the things that are.

In his desert preaching, he thunders a judgment at those who are content, prosperous, and comfortable with themselves and the way things are. His cry is heard everywhere, and even the curious are drawn to that desert place where things are stark and simple. In the desert, there is no noise, no clutter, only the wind and the presence of God. In that desert, the truth is inevitable and unavoidable.

John would have us in that desert where we and everyone who hears his cry can see them selves in truth where pretense, denial, and falsehood are useless. There is nothing soft or easy about the message in that desert.

It is a call to purity, to cleanliness, to holiness: a condition that confronts evil and sin for what it is. For a people in that age and this who have grown comfortable and compatible with sin, there is trouble. We don't like to talk about sin, and we certainly don't want to hear about it. But this desert wild man is not afraid to name it for what it is.

As I said on the Holy Day we have just observed, and some have not: we would rather try to explain human suffering, failure, and evil in terms of psychological disorders, social change, pressure, tension, depression and anxiety. But none of that talk changes a thing and says nothing about the truth.

After all, ages, cultures, psychology, and societies don't really exist. Only people do. Sin is what it is. All our pretending and denial never makes it go away. Even our absence from the confessional hasn't made better. It just adds to our moral misery and growing contentment with it.

We face tragedies like the killings in an Omaha Mall as though it is just something we have to live with these days. "What a shame." we say. "What a poor sick boy."

We endure bombings and war, poverty and hunger, homeless people on our streets, corporate greed, and the rich sheltered by their precious tax breaks and never call it by name. The longer we pretend it isn't sin, the more complacent we become. A wild desert man shouts: "Stop that!" There is sin in the world. It is concrete and real. It is ours.

It is not there because society or some system fails, but because we have done nothing and allowed

ourselves to become dull and selfish. We even like ourselves that way.

There will be no Silent Night. There will be no "Joy to the World" and nothing for Angels to sing about until we turn this around.

There will be no peace on earth until we make it. The coming of Christ that John proclaims is a coming into our hearts and our lives not some pile of straw in a manger.

And that coming is going to demand some sifting and sorting. John isn't talking to someone else. His voice and his message do not come to us from the past. We heard it today.

Audio Available

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Advent 3

12/16/2007

Isaiah 35:1-6 + Psalm 146 + James 5:7-1 + Matthew 11:2-11

Fr. Boyer

For anyone who has ever entertained even the slightest doubt about their faith in Jesus Christ or God's promises, this Gospel story is very important and John the Baptist suddenly becomes very, very real. He is sitting there in Herod's jail. It is the price he paid for speaking up when something was wrong. He has done what was right, and the consequence was prison, and it will eventually mean his execution. He has proclaimed the messiah, identified him, and heard the divine affirmation at the Baptism of Jesus. He has called everyone who would listen to repentance, and prompted them to be ready for the Kingdom of God. Now he sits in Herod's prison. What's wrong with this picture? He has grown up with the prophet's promise that when the messiah comes, he will set captives free. Yet, he's in Herod's jail.

We know his confusion. We understand his question and the question of his followers.

Parents know how it goes. You give birth and with dreams and hopes you raise a child as best you can, and suddenly you look at that child and say: "Where did you come from?" "Who is this?" Nothing goes as you planned, and that young adult is nothing like you hoped.

Couples look at each other with the same wonder. The dreams of a life together go awry. An infidelity breaks trust, an addiction seizes a beautiful life, a disease strikes at the most happy of moments, and suddenly nothing is the way you thought it was going to be.

Anyone who dares face life with hope and dreams and expectations knows exactly why John sent those disciples to Jesus.

Tragedies, disappointments, disasters, and even little things can make us turn to God and wonder:

"What's going on here?" "It's not supposed to be this way." If the pain is bad enough people we know give up all together and turn to other gods: drugs materialism, alcohol, sex, gambling, anything to find a fix or make things go the way they want them to go.

In the wisdom of Matthew's Gospel as we hear it today, Jesus only speaks briefly to the disciples of John, then he suddenly turns to speak to us, "the crowd."

To the disciples, he simply lists the work of the messiah as the ancient prophets had foretold in comparison to his own work. "This is what I have come to do. If this is what you have been waiting for, then, yes, I am the one who has come to do it. But if you have been waiting for something else, then perhaps you will have to go on waiting."

Then he turns to us and asks one of the most important questions: "What is it you expect here?" or, "What are you waiting for?" It is a caution not to expect salvation on our terms.

We ask for salvation and God responds in the cry of newborn child.

We ask for justice and God speaks of mercy.

We ask for forgiveness and God responds as a teacher who refuses to condemn a sinner.

We ask for reconciliation and God responds in the conversation of two men on a cross.

We ask for life and God responds with an empty tomb.

We ask for sustaining strength and comfort

and God responds with tongues of flame.

We ask for God's kingdom to come, and God calls forth the church.

John wanted a political messiah who was going to run Romans out of town, restore Israel to its glory and power. What he got was a lamb.

Like John we sometimes want a God who is going to ride in on a white horse and run off all the bad guys and fix everything that is broken. Instead, if we get this season right, God would rather restore us to our original greatness, and using one of our own, fulfill the plan God had long ago for how we might live together in trust, in mercy, and in love.

Isaiah in today's readings saw this restoration already beginning. Expecting it to continue would be wise. James proposes patience and an informed expectation so that we might wait for what is right and what is in God's plan. Losing heart or getting discouraged might happen, but only because we had the wrong expectation, not because God failed to act, to love, to be present, and to be with us.

Audio Available

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Advent 4

12/23/2007

Isaiah 7: 10-14 + Psalm 24 + Roman 1:1-7 + Matthew 1: 18-24

Fr. Boyer

He is the central human character at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel. He is no stranger to fear, disappointment, confusion, and doubt. He is the perfect example of what the Old Testament calls a "just man." That does not mean he is a "nice guy." He reminds us that the way we live our lives, the choices we make, and relationships we have make a difference. He could have followed every legal recourse and exercised his rights, but he did not do so. He could have done what was expected of him by others instead of what was asked of him. He could have punished her, taken her to court, gotten even, shamed and humiliated her.

Instead he ushered in a new definition of righteousness and nurtured to maturity a new definition of compassion and justice. He could have chosen a different role in the drama unfolding this week. It would have been a role of honor and respectability, security and safety.

Instead he chose to embrace a role defined by fear and uncertainty, danger and discomfort, newness and change. With a cast of characters that includes Archangels and a murderous king, he claims a bit part in the drama of salvation always knowing that the lead role belongs to someone else, and remembering that at best he is just a supporting actor in this drama. His name is Joseph, and every three years we tell his story. Parents among us would do well to introduce their children to this man. He towers above every other hero this world can produce.

First among men and first among fathers,

he is role model our children would do well to know. He is no celebrity. He will not show up on the cover of People magazine. He will not be chased around by paparazzi, nor be the subject of comments on Entertainment television.

He stands alone in our tradition as a man of faith, of trust, and commitment. He made a promise and he kept it even though for a brief frightening moment it looked as though he was the only promise keeper. He reminds us today that we are called to listen to the promise of angels, not the promise of power or prestige in this world. He reminds us today that we are called to nurture forgiveness and compassion, not obsess over our rights and privilege. He reminds us today that we are called to a creative love that knows no boundaries; a love that allows us to embrace the outcast and forgotten more than clutch the accepted and desirable.

So we gather here at the end of this Advent with the hope of Isaiah, the trust of Mary, the passion of John the Baptist, and the courage of Joseph. These are the virtues of those who passed these days in readiness.

The shattered hopes of John the Baptist are no less than the shattered dreams of Joseph the Carpenter. Yet both are spirit filled and listen and follow the Word of God.

Wake up! is the message Joseph keeps hearing not because he was sleeping and lazy; but because he needed to wake up to what was going on around him. He did wake up, again and again in the midst of more than one confusing and doubtful moments. He woke up to the power of the Holy Spirit, and the strength of his faith. Hours before we celebrate the coming of God in Human flesh, we would also do well to wake up. Wake up and look around at what is going on, not find fear in it, but

find the presence of God and see the divine dimension which calls us to holiness, to courage, to forgiveness and compassion; which call us to stop demanding our rights all the time and look a bigger picture and live a bigger life.

Audio Available

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Christmas

12/25/2007

Isaiah 9:2-7 + Psalm 96 + Titus 2:11-14 + Luke 2: 1-4

Fr. Boyer

It is beginning to dawn on me

that as long as we keep celebrating the birth of Christ in the way we have for the past few weeks, we are never going to get it right. Nice as it is for our economy to shop until we drop or run out of money; wonderful as it is to receive cards and family photos from friends with those letters that tell us way more than we need to know, and thrilling as it is to travel and spend some time with our families, if you get there at all with luggage, it is getting more and more difficult to get the point. Our children grow up thinking this is a birthday party for Jesus, and never get deeper into the mystery, the wonder, and the power that lurks in the reality of this festival.

The Incarnation is not something we celebrate.

It is something we must become.

What is beginning to dawn on me then is that as long we simply stick with the celebration and all its trappings and customs, enjoyable as they really are; we may never become anything. We are getting so trapped in all of this that the only thing we are becoming is greedy, guilty, depressed, and exhausted.

I don't think that is what we are supposed to be become because of the Incarnation!

The wonder of this night does not stop in Bethlehem. There is no point in celebrating the birth of Christ without wondering and asking "why?" "What was God thinking?" This Gospel we proclaim in a story both familiar yet strange, does not simply speak of God and what God does, it also speaks of what has happened to humanity.

There is in this story a marvelous cast of characters, a whole parade of people touched by this birth: an aging priest and his childless wife; a young woman called to give birth in a way unheard of in human history;

the dark night sky shining with God's glory

and shepherds hearing "Good News of Great Joy"; an aging couple living and waiting for God's anointed.

And Matthew gives us an anointed king who is really a brutal killer,

a young and bold prophet who ends up in jail for his courage beheaded while his "messiah" runs around helping everyone else, a young man full of dreams and hopes whose fiancé comes up pregnant, wise men from afar who follow a star and kneel before a child. It is in the end, an affirmation of humanity in all its brokenness and its glory. It is a story told again and again in countless unnamed people among whom God's Word continues to become flesh and dwell among us.

Those angels were bending near the earth with their harps of gold (not to heaven).

They were speaking to us (ordinary people),

shepherds at work no less! It's all so familiar, yet so strange. Salvation breaks into creation by a birth.

What could be more ordinary, common place, and normal than a birth? Yet behind it all for people of faith there is yet something curious. This silent night we find goodness and holiness in a scene so ordinary that we might miss it

if it were not for our brothers and sisters who came before us. They left us with a faith that is capable of

knowing that in the very ordinariness of our lives and times,
goodness is more powerful than evil, faith is stronger than death.

A stable can be cathedral.

Humanity can become the dwelling place of the divine. Bread can become God. And so this feast is then,
not something simply to celebrate every three hundred and sixty five days, but something we become
every day.

"What shall we become?" we might ask ourselves in silence as we gaze a baby in a manger. what is it we
shall become.....

and when?

Audio Available

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Feast of the Holy Family

12/30/2007

Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14 + Psalm 128 + Colossians 3:12-17 + Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Fr. Boyer

I grew up with images of the Holy Family

that always made the Boyers look like the Clampetts. There were those images of Mary and Joseph on holy cards. There was a picture hanging in my school classroom in which Mary was always weaving something.

Joseph had obviously been out picking lilies because there was always one in his hand, and I guess he cut it with a carpenter's square, because that was in the other hand.

The boy was always gazing at his holy parents, waiting to obey their next command.

They were the Waltons of Nazareth!

They didn't live in Norman. If they did, they belonged to some other parish.

That image is a perfect recipe for discouragement. It is one more crushing blow to the single parent family. To many mothers it is an invitation to resentment because it would be so wonderful to raise only one perfect child with the help of a perfect husband, the model of chastity, hard work, gentleness and consideration. And in front of that image stands every father, frustrated, defeated, tired, and anxious looking at that perfect family and left to feel defeated, inadequate, and guilty.

That image is like the hundreds of Christmas card photos I have just received. I have a family too, and on several occasions I have taken that photo and I remember what it was like moments before the flash captured one moment that was carefully posed. For just that moment, everyone stopped talking, giving orders, and complaining.

The Gospel writers would have us understand that it was no different in Nazareth. We must keep the whole story in mind as we celebrate this day called: "Holy Family." Their life was not a Christmas Card photo. What makes that family holy is not some kind of perfection, but perhaps some kind of fidelity. Do not forget that this family's beginnings were a bit rocky and uncertain.

Joseph had to make a tough decision about whether or not to keep Mary as his wife.

The silence of the Gospel writers suggest Joseph's early death. In the public part of Jesus' life there was not a nuclear holy family, but a whole village. The evangelists portray a large, extended family, most of whom are unsympathetic and downright hostile to Jesus' vision. Mark even writes that some of them thought Jesus was crazy. Today's story suggests not a perfect family, but one on the move for the sake of safety.

The family whose story is told in this Gospel had its ups and downs. The family whose story is told in this Gospel lived through confusion, strange journeys, dealt with disgruntled relatives and people who did not understand. We are not here to celebrate the ideal family with a perfect mom, an honest dad, and an impeccable child.

I think this feast is for my Aunt who was never blessed with children and now lives alone after the death of her husband last year. No children to care for her. I think this feast is for a woman I passed in a nursing home earlier this week sitting by the door looking for someone, anyone to come for her. I think this feast is for a mother I know whose son is waiting for a bone-marrow transplant; she stays with him constantly while her husband simply cannot visit because of his fears and disappointment. I think this feast is for gay people whose lives never quite fit in and never really will. I think this feast is for single

parents who just do the best they can, and it never feels like enough. I think this feast is for families torn apart by divorce, and because of it all cannot find their way to church anymore. This feast is for all of them and for all of us

because we are God's chosen ones, holy, and beloved. What we all have in common is the power of the Gospel and the pain of living close to or distant from those we love best.

It seems like a lot of pain sometimes. But in the end, there is nothing quite like a family, however it is composed. After all, it is in family that we learn to be sensitive to the presence of others, the needs of others, and the rights of all human beings. Family is the ultimate school where one learns to love, to forgive, to be responsible, and to respect. It is also the first and best school of holiness.

Audio Available

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Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
1/1/2008

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

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Epiphany of the Lord
1/6/2008

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

351
Baptism of the Lord
1/13/2008

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 2

1/20/2008

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6 + Psalm 40 + 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 + John 1:29-34

Fr. Boyer

"I did not know him." John says twice today. "I did not know him."

As I was sitting with this Gospel text this past week, I remembered those words of Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest. "I do not know him." Peter said three times that day. That man, Peter will emerge in next Sunday's Gospel. The two of them will lead us this year toward Lent soon to begin.

John and Peter: one who saw the spirit, and one who received the spirit. Both of them by the power of that Spirit become the ultimate model of "Witness".

One of the major themes of John's Gospel is that of a "trial". Jesus is in a literary sense always on trial in John's Gospel, and this culminates in the long trial narrative before Pilate which is the heart of John's Gospel. The witnesses come and go. Some lie and some bear witness to the truth. In John's Gospel, sin is a power arrayed against Jesus, and "world" is often used negatively to depict the organized power of evil. A contemporary parallel would be structural or social sin.

Notice that in the testimony of John, Jesus came to take away sin: Singular, not plural.

John's testimony is that Jesus came to take away the power of sin, to take away this "system" which John calls "the world."

Followers of Jesus should take courage and find confidence because this one we come to know because of John, Peter, and other witnesses will conquer the world. This Gospel today is both a preview of the theology of John's Gospel and a summons to faithful witness. True witness is not a matter of pointing out someone's faults,

but a practice of virtue openly, clearly, obviously. Faith without witness is empty and hypocritical. This world is full of that;

full of people who cover their tracks

by pointing out the shortcomings and sins of others. This world is full of simple piety

that mistakes timid religiosity for fidelity and real virtue. They would silence the voices of true witnesses complaining and objecting that religion has no place

confronting systems of social sin in this world.

Whatever is in conflict to the teaching of Christ must be confronted with and by the power of the Spirit that has come upon us all. That Spirit is not a "come and go" relationship. If you will allow the expression: "It was not a fly-by" over Jesus

or over His Assembled Apostolic Church on Pentecost. What we hear John say today is that the spirit "REMAINED" upon him

exactly as it does upon Peter and those who are church gathered together in faith.

The Spirit is upon us. It remains upon us so that we may bear witness to the truth.

We cannot say: "I did not know him." any longer. Our witness if it is truly prophetic will not simply be voices raised in judgment of evil, which by itself does no good:

but rather voices raised, example given in clear affirmation and practice of good. We must do good, not just be good. Being good is only half a life. Doing good is the rest - the fullness of life: the life of the Spirit,

the life of those who can and do bear witness by the power of a Spirit-filled life. This is the Life and the Spirit into which we too have been Baptized.

Audio Available

Isaiah 8: 23-9:3 + Psalm 27 + 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17 + Matthew 4:12-17

Fr. Boyer

It is not a good time. The voice crying in the wilderness now thunders in prison. Authority does what authority always does:

tries to silence what ever threatens.

The response of Jesus is not to run. He is the light shining in darkness, so he goes headlong into the darkness. He leaves the safety of his home, the protection of his family. The town and territory to which he goes is the land of that authority. The infant who once fled to Egypt for safety now walks straight into the danger. It's a dangerous move, taking a message of light into darkness, a message of life into a land of death. He could easily suffer the same fate as John, yet he goes to Galilee. But this story of Matthew is not just about Herod, John, or Jesus. Beneath their story a prophecy unfolds. Isaiah predicted this. Jesus is not a fool teasing the wicked; he moves by God's plan with a message that cannot be imprisoned.

So now, the torch is passed from John to Jesus. A desert voice moves to the cities and towns, to the sea and temple. He leaves what is safe, secure, known, and predictable

because the Kingdom of God is at hand. But the people do not know how to reach for it.

If they would change the way they think and act the Spirit would come upon them. Yet they sit in darkness. The Kingdom of Heaven is now; but the people are not. He knows the task is bigger than he is that it will take longer than a life time, and so he looks for help. He looks first to a pair of brothers.

Matthew wants us to get that point. He says twice in one sentence. He goes to them. He does not wait for them to come to him. The condition for coming with him into the mission, into the Kingdom, into life is that they leave nets and boats, family and father. Not that these are bad, but because what they mean and what they provide is not enough.

Often I have tried to imagine that father standing there with those empty boats wondering what he was going to do next without them. Nowhere is it ever suggested that he yelled after them, objected, or resented their desire and the prompting of their hearts which led them to leave all things and follow that man of enchantment.

Told today, it is a story that might well frighten and discourage some parents: this thought that a child might just get up and

leave without ever looking back. However, the people who first heard Matthew's story knew it well.

Many sitting there had been kicked out of their families for following Jesus, picking up his mission, and being willing to look for something or someone who would teach them how to live in their present with the hope of experiencing the future fullness of God's Kingdom. That is, in the end, what this man Jesus came to teach us.

"Repent." he says. Repentance is not an invitation to feel sorry. It is a demand to take a second look at our values and our lives. Religion and faithful followers of Christ challenge the practices and values that support and enable injustice. What this conversion shall require is what unfolds in the chapters to come in Matthew's Gospel.

We have preview of it today. Let go. Leave behind. Take a risk. Believe the Prophets. Do something with your life that is more than catching fish to eat. Life is more than a trip to the store or shopping the mall. Be something more than a repetition of your parents. In the end, they don't want that anyway. Loving

parents always want their children to do more than they did and surpass them in goodness and holiness, love and service.

This is a vocation story proclaimed in a month our church calls Vocations Month.

Parents, look at the father of those men in this Gospel. Don't you think he brought them up with hearts burning for the Kingdom of God? Young people, who are you going to follow, shallow narcissistic celebrities and greedy doped up athletes? Maybe following the light into the darkness would be better.

Audio Available

354

Ordinary Time 4

2/3/2008

Zephania 2:3-12 + Psalm 146 + 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 + Matthew 5: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

Most of us might easily point to these verses of Matthew's Gospel as the most familiar part of his work. It is so familiar I suspect that with a little thought we could probably recite the whole list. We're heard it and read that often! What Matthew unfolds here is list of the kind of people Jesus declares "happy", and then he tells us what they can hope for. There is here a two part message: qualifications for entering the Kingdom of heaven, and then what those who seek the kingdom might expect. Failure to keep the two parts together turns the first part into a set of rules: be poor, be merciful, be pure of heart, that sort of thing. If we do that, we miss the good part; the hopes that one might expect who is willing to be poor or merciful, or pure of heart.

This sermon is intended to stir up our hopes, give us something to look forward to, motivate us and urge on to practice the virtues it proposes.

Perhaps we would get the point and take the virtues more seriously if we thought more about them. The list we get here includes the kingdom of heaven, comfort and consolation, sharing in God's reign, divine justice, divine mercy, seeing God, being children of God and perfect joy and happiness. Who wouldn't want those things? What they all boil down to is simply the fullness of life in the presence of God. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our wildest dreams, our best hopes, our most fervent wishes are not only possible, but they are real.

The first part of each beatitude simply lists the character and the behavior of those who really do reach for fullness of life in the presence of God. These people are not economically deprived. They are poor meaning that stuff is not as important as God. They simply believe that if anything they have gets in the way of their relationship with God, it has to go. In short, they are compassionate, meek, merciful, sincere, honest, and people who make the world a better place. They are willing to be insulted and persecuted for their ideals and values.

But something whispers in the back of our minds that all this is mountain talk.

We all come down the mountain sooner or later; down to the flat land. We hit bottom again where poverty crushes all the way through, mourning has not comfort, persecution is victory for the persecutors, mercy is limited, peacemaking impossible, and meekness inherits nothing but its own refusal to fight back. For a moment there on the mountain, we had breath of mountain-fresh-air. Then we're back to human pollution.

Jesus takes us to the mountain today to show us what can be, and lift up our hopes, stir our dreams. The beatitudes are more than the beginning of Matthew's Gospel. They are the starting point for everyone of us who would reach for God, and they are a description of the people for whom God would reach. We look around and see how much more work there is to do. We are not poor enough. We are not merciful, compassionate, gentle, or peacemaking. Too many of us never grieve because we have never loved.

From this mountain today, we can look ahead into the Forty Days about to begin. We might consider again the call to repentance. Not an invitation to feel sorry, it is call for a change in behavior, an demand that we take a close long look at what we're doing, why, and where it is going to leave us. Blessed or Happy are those who have been to the mountain and know the way to the fullness of life.

Audio Available

355

Ash Wednesday

2/6/2008

Joel 2:12-18 + Psalm 51 + 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 + Matthew 6:1-16, 16-21

Fr. Boyer

We celebrate feasts differently today than our ancestors in faith celebrated feasts.

They would keep a long fast leading up to a feast, and then there would be a joyful celebration last night that might last for days.

Now, there is a long celebration leading up to the feast, and then a fast follows.

Our way of celebrating Christmas is a perfect example. At some secret day in mid October Walmart, Target, and Hobby Lobby put out their Christmas stuff. That triggers something in us, and then for about two months we begin to celebrate. The parties start, the decorations go up, cards go out, and Christmas music begins to play. When Christmas day finally rolls around we are finished, worn out, and full of we can eat and drink. The December 26, we've had it and we're ready to move on; and then begins the fasting which the secular world calls "the diet." Christmas Season used to last until February 2. In fact, in Vatican City the big tree and the Manger Scene just came down. In Oklahoma, Christmas season ended at sundown December 25.

This is a curious reversal.

In our tradition as Catholics, the build-up was always toward a feast. Celebration came after. Today the feast is first, the fast is after. It's curious. My suspicion is that we know how to anticipate and event, but have not yet figured out how to sustain it. So we confuse anticipation with celebration. I think one of the reasons is that in today's life we just find it hard to anticipate anything. We want everything to happen quickly. We do not live well with the tension of something unresolved. Longing and fasting are not strong points in our culture.

Consequently without building up properly for a feast, we do not celebrate properly either.

To feast, one must fast.

To taste something extra ordinary, one must have tasted the ordinary. The sublime depends upon sublimation. Seasons of play follow seasons of work. Seasons of intimacy follow seasons of solitude. Presence means something when there has been absence. There is a rhythm to life that must be observed,

and when it breaks down, nothing is special and there is little to enjoy. So, Christmas is hardly special when we celebrated it during Advent. Weddings are not very special when the bride and groom have been living together already. Premature experience has a way of draining us of enthusiasm and expectations which can only come from painful waiting, longing, and sublimation.

Let's get it right this year and this season.

It's time to fast and get ready for the feast. If we take it seriously, the feast will take more than one day to celebrate.

The church gives us four: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Saturday of Vigil, and Sunday. Entering this fast anticipating the Feast of Life might suddenly lead us to see that this life is all anticipation for Life's fullness in the Kingdom of God. Life here is itself a fast when lived in a spirit of self-sacrifice and self-giving. Not taking all there is, not keeping all we have, not demanding and expecting that we have a right to more of anything makes all of life a fast for the great feast to come.

Audio Available

356

Lent 1

2/10/2008

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 + Psalm 32 + Romans 5:12-19 + Matthew 4:1-11

Fr. Boyer

Since the average age in this parish is 33, I realize that when I think about the days when I was 16 and 17 years old, most of you were not even born. I was that young once, and to the terror of my parents, I bought my own car. More often than not, when I would leave home for work, school, or to take my sister somewhere in that car, my father or mother would stand at the door and shout: "Remember who you are." At the time I thought it was silly. Did they think I had amnesia?

A simply kind of Gospel wisdom brought that memory back to me as I sat with this piece of Matthew's Gospel. As always, Matthew has one eye on the Old Testament and one eye on the New. His experience of Jesus and his memory are thoroughly conditioned by the stories, images, and the revelation of Israel's experience with God.

They went to the desert, and their temptations in that 40 year span of time centered on food and water, the protective presence of God, and whether or not God was really God; a God beyond their control. In other words, it was about trust in God.

So, Matthew has Jesus go to the desert, but not before he gets in the Jordan for Baptism and has his revelation about his identity.

Now think of the Israelites who did not go into the desert until they passed through the water of the Red Sea. In that desert, during those 40 years, they developed their identity as God's People, but time after time, temptation after temptation, they forgot who they were.

Jesus is now baptized. He knows who he is, and he goes to the desert for 40 days, and temptations begin.

Temptation is something we could all talk about. Everyone ought to be an expert. Temptations have an advantage over us. They are there first. They lie in wait, and they get to make the first move. When temptations finally make their move, it's usually quick. We rarely have enough time to think it through, consult, and consider all the implications. Speed and pressure are in temptations favor. There is almost always this sense that we need to do it now. If we don't, we may not get another chance. Later when we look back, we realize that if we had just applied the brakes, things would have been different. Temptation has the upper hand, and we end up saying to ourselves: "How did I get into this?"

Of course, there are different levels of temptations. Looking up from dinner with the desert cart parked by your table is not the same as looking up from your desk and seeing another's exam answers right in front of you, or suddenly realizing that you could make a few adjustments on your tax table or the books at work and come home with a few more bucks in your pocket. Either way, temptations whether they are big or small are always about identity: who we are.

This forty-day season slows us down a bit and puts on the brakes. With the Triduum ahead of us - those three days when our identity at the table of the Lord, at the foot of the cross, and at the waters of baptism establish our identity, we have time to remember who we are as sons and daughters of God. Temptations are attractive because they appeal to a fantasy; to something we are not but wish we were. So it seems as though we can have it all, or have what we always wanted: a life of good fortune, a life always satisfied, a life without injury, or a life of power.

How could we possibly remember who we are when these things are offered? Eve and Adam know this story well.

Slow down. We move too fast. Fantasy that leads us away from the truth is the threshold of temptation. Knowing who we are, remembering who we are makes the difference. In Matthew's 40 day story Jesus does not use some divine power to resist and control temptation and the tempter; he simply remembers who he is. We can do the same.

Audio Available

357

Lent 2

2/17/2008

Genesis 12:1-4 + Psalm 121 + Romans 4:1-5, 12-17 + Matthew 17:1-9

Fr. Boyer

This is not so much a story about Jesus as it is about the disciples, and it must leave us wondering about ourselves. It is more about discipleship than it is about the identity of Jesus. There are ancient symbols here: a mountain and a cloud. The high mountain is about the ascent of the human to the divine. And so, they go up - "by themselves" says Matthew. Then a cloud comes.

It is the divine, and there the human and the divine meet. Suddenly they are no longer "by themselves". They have company: Moses and Elijah. These are also "mountain men" let's call them. They have gone up to mountains to look far off and find the way.

It is there, above the plain that they can see which way to go.

Just as they are about to see the plan, there is that voice, and they fall to the ground in fear. A most tender moment occurs that we often miss when reading these verses of Matthew's Gospel. The writer simply says: "He touched them." They look and they see Jesus. He is the only one left to lead them, to teach them what they must know, and to take them from fear to love.

So this story is about them - about these disciples and how they moved from fear to love: by listening to Jesus. Before their experience, they resisted. They wanted nothing to do with what Jesus said to them about the coming death and resurrection, betrayal and trial. Now things will be different. Peter, whose mind had been set on human things rather than divine things changes as he now begins to listen to Jesus who thinks "the things of God." In the end, it is these disciples who are changed on that mountain. Jesus goes back to the way he was. They do not.

Matthew includes this story about the disciples so that his church, our church, which too often thinks human things rather than things of God might be touched by Jesus and rise up from fear or from denial. Virtue is tough, and the virtuous life is hard work. It is hard to listen to Jesus when there is so much noise around us.

It is hard to hear the voice of God calling us to compassion, peace, and truth when human thinking and the noise of this world is violent, powerful, and destructive of the vulnerable, weak, and the poor.

We carry a moral agenda if we listen to God's Son. It is a heavy burden to be committed to compassion and face suffering. We must not ignore or dismiss it. It is a heavy burden to be committed to peace and face division and hostility. We must find a way to reconcile without making things worse.

It is a heavy burden to be committed to the truth and face cover-ups, and lies from the highest offices to the smallest child in a classroom. We must not be fooled into thinking that anything can be hidden.

What we discover on the mountain is that

we are not alone. Human effort is never just that. For those who listen to God's Son, there will also be divine grace bringing divine power. What we do in response to what God asks cannot fail, because we do not do it alone. When we finally embrace this truth;

we can rise without fear, we can listen to Him, be open to God's will, and engage ourselves in the mission of Jesus Christ.

Then the Transfiguration will no longer be a story about Jesus or about Peter, James and John. It will finally and rightly be about us.

No Audio Available

358

Lent 2

2/17/2008

Genesis 12:1-4 + Psalm 121 + Romans 4:1-5, 12-17 + Matthew 17:1-9

Fr. Sherry

Audio Available

359

Lent 3

2/24/2008

Ex 17:3-7 + Ps 95:1-9 + Rom 5:1-8 + Jn 4:5-42

Fr. Letourneau

Audio Available

360
Lent 4
3/2/2008

1 Samuel 16:1-7, 10-13 + Psalm 23 + Ephesians 5:8-14 + John 9: 1-41

Fr. Boyer

This is a thrilling and exciting story.

It is dramatic in the typical way John constructs his stories. There are details that excite the imagination, and those details tell most of the story. This is not simply a story about a blind man who bumped into Jesus. Do not miss the detail that Jesus went looking for him not just once, but twice. This not a story about sight being restored. The man was blind from birth, from the beginning. There are unmistakable references to creation here.

Get that little detail about dirt. Think of creation. Then remember where the man is sent: to the Pool - the Water - and the name of the pool is "Sent." Then recall what God does on the first day of creation: bring light out of darkness.

Suddenly this is not about a cure. This is about creation, about what God has done, and what God is still doing. It's about what is happening now with Jesus, and what is happening those Jesus seeks. That man did not simply have blind eyes cured. He came to the realization that God's creative power was at the center of his being. No story here about a blind man, no story about something Jesus did; this is a story about conversion as a new creation; how it works, and what it brings about. It is a spiritual experience, a spiritual cure far more significant than getting 20/20 vision.

Throughout the Gospel of John, the theme of Light and victory of light over darkness weaves its way through every scene. From the first chapter to the Passion, there is a constant movement from darkness to light.

Right up to the dramatic moment when darkness covers the earth in the middle of the day as the sun is darkened.

What John would have us understand is this truth:

that Christ the Light has come to seek those who live in darkness. Now darkness itself is neither bad nor sinful. Jesus deals with that through the discussion of this man's blindness: did it come from his parents and their sin? No. Darkness is simply the stuff in which creation happens. What is wrong and sinful is to choose to remain in darkness and refuse the light when it comes.

This is the heart of our Lenten story today.

Sin is a stubborn attachment to darkness.

When the Pharisees refuse to change, refuse to open their eyes to the Light in their midst, when they accuse others of sin

who clearly see the creative work of God in their midst, they are in trouble. Avoid Jesus as light, then meet him as judge.

The Pharisees had an investment in darkness

in keeping things the same, in keeping things in control, their control. When they see this man who is so different, they see a threat.

We must understand this story my friends:

that blind man did not ask for anything.

Jesus went looking for him. The gift did not make his life easier at first. He ended up expelled from the synagogue. But this story reveals that through human weakness the power of God enters human life, and the power is creative. Light comes to those who recognize that life is blindness without Christ; and comes through their weaknesses.

Darkness comes to those who without Christ claim to see. It is a message for Lent.

It is a call to choose Christ, to make him first and more important than others or the approval of others. We have been to the pool, the "sending pool" of Baptism. We have been enlightened. Why should any still live in darkness unless they have chosen it?

Audio Available

361
Lent 5
3/9/2008

Fr. N. Thomas

Audio Available

362

Passion Sunday

3/16/2008

Isaiah 50: 4-7 + Psalm 22 + Philippians 2: 6-1 + Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

Fr. Boyer

(The Homily is delivered before the Proclamation of the Passion today.)

We begin today a week of remembering. Our remembering however is not simply the calling to mind a past event that might stir up gratitude or sympathy. Our remembering now is the heart of our Catholic faith. It is about connections. This remembering is the opposite of "dismembering."

The first consequence of sin, the break up of our relationship with God is over.

We are reconnected to God by the faithful obedience of His Son. We are brought together with each other by our Communion in and through His Son. The one who remembers us and whom we remember died violently, shockingly, suddenly, but not senselessly.

The one who remembers us and whom we remember was mocked, pierced, and spit upon, without losing sight of his mission. The one who remembers us and whom we remember was betrayed by a trusted friend, abandoned by everyone he loved when he needed them most.

We remember his living as well as his dying.

We remember his giving and his serving. We do so to experience every day his presence to us here now and always. We do so to allow that presence to transform us.

Listen now to the Passion of Jesus Christ as recorded by Matthew. Notice carefully that the evil of sin is not just the torture Christ endured, but the fact that he endured it alone. It is the abandonment of Christ, the faithlessness of those who professed to follow him that Matthew reveals. In this account of the Passion, except at the table of the Supper, Jesus is nearly silent. He is not the central figure, the crowd is. We are ones in Matthew who are the focus of the Passion. Jesus is the recipient of the actions of others.

We remember this today in order to grow in faith:

to become defenders and selfless servants of the least, the little ones, poor and hungry, thirsty, naked, and homeless. We remember in order to become more like this one in whom we find our reason for living, our hope in dying, and our faith in the future where all our memories will be forever realized.

Audio Available

363

Holy Thursday

3/20/2008

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 + Psalm 116 + 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 + John 13: 1-15

Fr. Boyer

The Jesus of John's Gospel is Divine, all knowing, all powerful.

He knows, says John that the Father had given all things into his hands. He knows who will betray him.

This Jesus does not eat the Passover meal. He is the Passover Meal. There is no Passover meal in John's Gospel, no institution of the Eucharist. The Jesus of John's Gospel does not pass broken bread and a cup around with a command. The Jesus of John's Gospel has a different command.

He takes off his robes and wraps himself in a towel. Tomorrow his robes will be stripped from him, and he will be tied by others. Before they can do their deed, he does it himself. What he does seems at first to be act of humility. That is what Peter thought.

But this is an act of love, not humility. It is a divine act, a revelation of how much God loves us revealed in a new Commandment upon which the New Covenant will rest: the Commandment of Love.

Yet if we think that this love is a feeling, we still get it wrong like Peter. The Love of Jesus is not a feeling, it is an action.

This is the love by which Jesus set aside all that was His. No power, no authority, no exaltation. He left that aside to show His love, and he asks us to do the same: to set aside our perceived privilege, our desire for power, our controlling ways, and our expectations, and be empty for the sake of others. He says to Peter and to all who fail to understand, if you do not participate in this self emptying, you cannot enjoy the blessings it will guarantee.

Never did Jesus deny the dignity that was his as God, but he did not use it to safeguard his own comfort or well-being. Instead, his self-giving is the model and example of what his disciples must be willing to offer others.

In John's Gospel there is water everywhere. From water in the Jordan for John's Baptism, from water into wine at Cana, from water at the Temple's Pool, from water at Jacob's well, water in this basin, finally to water from his pierced side. By water our thirst is quenched, we are healed, washed and brought to life. See it once more. Understand, believe, and imitate his example keeping the commandment he has given us all.

Audio Available

364

Good Friday

3/21/2008

Isaiah 52: 13-53:12 + Psalm 31 + Hebrews 4: 14-16, 5: 7-9 + John 18:1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

Earlier in John's Gospel, Chapter 11 to be exact, the movement toward this moment began. Threatened by an outsider, by some one out of their control, the leaders of the people ran to their high priest a man named Caiphas. He knew that the Romans would sack him if he did not keep his Jews in line. The closer Jesus got to Jerusalem, the greater was his following. Caiphas was at risk, and so the carpenter's son from Nazareth had to go. He was upsetting things.

All that we have just heard in the Passion is the consequence of a way of thinking that found its ultimate expression in the one quote of this man Caiphas that has lasted longer than he did: "It is better that one man should die for the people." That haunting quotation expresses a perverse truth that we have yet to question. Caiphas, even though he was put out by the Romans is yet to be silenced.

Better this death than have our lives upset.

Better this death than we should have to change.

Better this death than we should do without anything we want.

And so it goes on and on and on.

Believing this perversity means that capital punishment will find supporters who believe that people should be put to death. Caiphas is still saying, "Better that one should die."

Believing this perversity means an unborn child has its life taken because it is better than upsetting one's plans and one's future. Caiphas is still saying, "Better than one should die."

Believing this perversity means the poor stay poor because we cannot afford welfare, Medicare, day care, or support mothers at home with small children.

Caiphas is still saying, "Better that one should die."

Believing this perversity means our country will not allow refugees because we fear they will take our jobs and have an adverse effect on our standard of living.

Caiphas is still saying, "Better that one should die."

We take the resources of this earth to support a life style we think we deserve and do not respect nature, but just consume and pollute the environment for future generations.

Caiphas is still saying, "Better that one man should die."

It's like a great litany of death that is repeated again and again from Caiphas to us. Better these deaths than we should be upset or have to change.

When Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, Stan Rother, and Anne Frank are killed, when the clan murders civil rights workers in Mississippi, when oppressive regimes intimidate people and make them disappear, Caiphas is still saying, "Better that one person should die for the people."

But it isn't better. It is not better at all. We need the courage to say that and believe it. We need to be less intimidated by our own weaknesses and fears and more courageous in moving out of our affluence, privilege and good name, less timid, small and petty and more willing to sacrifice and die rather than let an innocent person die by thinking that it might be better than risk upsetting the way things are or always have been. For this kind of courage we ought to pray today as we look at the cross. This isn't the time for sentimentality. Gospel love is not about feelings. It is about action. If we respond to God's love at all it will be by action.

Joseph of Aramathea emerges in this Passion as a man of courage. He stepped forward by name in the absence of others to get the body of Jesus down from that cross. But he only took down the body. The truth is, Christ is still on the cross. Christ still is crucified as long as Caiphas holds his power over us leading us to believe and act on the belief that it is better for one person to die than have things upset or change.

The death of Jesus, an innocent man, is the consequence of thinking like Caiphas. Our lack of courage is no greater or less than the lack of courage on the part of the closest friends of Jesus. They are nowhere to be found in the passion accounts. They have all gone missing rather than call into question the thinking of Caiphas. As we ponder the cross this day, we must ponder the attitude that leaves Christ hanging there still all alone.

Audio Available

Fr. Boyer

My dear friends, in the darkness of this night, we stand in awe before the power of light and life which reveals to those who wish to see and understand the wonder of God; Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier: a God of love and mercy. We gather in holy place tonight and express that wonder and our deepest hopes in the presence of these 50 people whose faith and hope has become our own. We see in them what we have become. While we watch and listen to what they say and do, we are reminded of what we must all become: a people open to grace, seeking the truth, dying and rising, filled with the Spirit. They remind us that conversion is way of life, not a one-time event. What they are tonight for us, is what we must become.

For you, our blessed elect, the time has come to wrap yourselves in mystery; not in the sense of something you can't understand, but in the sense of mysterion: a gift from God that you will unwrap again and again in years to come; a gift in which you shall take unending delight. From this night on, life is that gift; and from now on, you must not think of life as a possession, something that is yours, something that is yours to control or protect. It is no longer a possession you can choose to share with others or from which others can be excluded.

If we see ourselves as a kind of property we have a right to control rather than as a gift with infinite depth we are meant to experience, we will make radically different decisions when we are faced with moments in time that threaten our autonomy. We do not exist alone. We have no identity without other. We would not be here had not two people come together in intimacy with God to conceive this gift. Our lives are grounded in this mystery which we are meant to live. Our lives are not a form of property. The inevitable end of that thinking is despair because when suffering comes (suffering we cannot control) there is no hope.

Grasp that cross hanging from your neck right now. Hold it. May it be for you what it is for this church you are becoming: a sign of hope that we share because we have received the mysterion. It is both a sign of what it means to live on this side of death, and the resurrection we hope for. It is a reminder that loving surrender makes suffering a sacrifice of love that redeems not an experience of misery we have to control. Buddhism speaks of existence as suffering. It is inevitable to the Buddhist mind that to live is to suffer and then to die. It is tragic, this way of thinking. What we all know to be true is that suffering is inevitable and dying is unavoidable. Yet what people of our faith and this religion believe is that suffering and dying are not problems to be relieved; but that they are a sign of the kind of world we live in, either a world that ends in, and is ultimately about the betrayal of our hope; or a world that is about the hope that transcends this suffering and these limits.

I have read that when the great church historian Jaroslav Pelikan was dying he said: "If Christ is risen, then nothing else matters." then, after a pause, he said, "And if Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters."

There is a choice for you, the elect. It is a choice between hope and hopelessness. The meaning of your lives is not found in the experiences of the moment, and experiences you can understand and control. The meaning of your life will be found when you surrender, let go, and fall headlong into the embrace of

God who made you, calls you, and waits for you. When that happens, there will be no fear in you and no suffering you cannot endure. To that truth we say: "Amen" because Christ has risen, and so must we. If you want that gift and seek to be identified with him, move forward now into the mystery.

Audio Available

366

Easter Sunday

3/23/2008

Acts 10:34-43 + Psalm 118 + Colossians 3: 1-4 + Matthew 28: 1-10

Fr. Boyer

After forty years of preaching Easter Homilies, I am beginning to get the idea. Easter is not a day or a season. It is a perspective, a lens through which one can view the world and history.

Those who think of Easter as a day or season, think of Easter in terms of "how" and "what". "What happened in that tomb behind the stone?" "How did that stone get moved?" "What did he look like if Mary didn't recognize him?" "How did he get around if he showed up in so many places?" This kind of thinking needs evidence. For these people proving the resurrection is a big issue. It is also a losing proposition since an empty tomb is only an empty tomb and you can make anything out of it you want. Since the eye witnesses are gone and all we have left is their testimony, we can't ask any more questions.

When you begin to consider Easter in another way, there is a different set of issues. The "what" and "how" questions become irrelevant. "What does it mean?" is the big question, and "What happens to me because of it?" is another. Those other questions about how and what happened are silly and trivial by comparison.

If Jesus has risen from the dead, the question to ask is: "What does that mean, and what is happening to me because of it." We know from the Gospel accounts what it meant for those who had been with him. It meant that their sorrow was turned in joy, that their fear was challenged, and that if they stayed together, lived together, and remembered what Jesus had taught them, their lives would see and do greater things than they could ever have dreamed of. Their testimony tells us that their sorrow lasted less than a day. In forty days time (a Biblical, symbolic number) their fear vanished, and that timid, unfaithful, confused, doubt filled group of unlikely leaders emerged with a courage, a spirit, and an understanding of what had happened that caught the attention of a whole city and soon the whole earth. Pentecost.

If you are interested in shifting from Easter as a calendar date to Easter as a way of seeing, believing, and understanding things, you have to begin asking those other questions and the last and biggest is "What happens to me because Christ rose from the dead?"

We Christian people, especially we Catholic people with our crucifixes and Good Friday cannot just focus on the fact that Christ died for us. That does not finish the story. More important than his suffering and death is the fact that he rose for us and sent us the Spirit. This is why I say: Easter is a lens - it gives us the whole picture with which we may then explore the whole Paschal mystery.

That whole picture then is not just Good Friday, not just Easter but also the Forty Days, the Ascension, and Pentecost. Look through the lens, and here is what you see: Good Friday=loss. Easter=reception of new life. Forty Days=grieving the old and adjusting to the new. Ascension=letting go of the old without clinging. Pentecost=reception of a new spirit for the new life that one is already living. That is the paschal mystery, all of it from Good Friday till Pentecost.

Looking through that lens we can understand that there are two kinds of death: "terminal" and "paschal." The first one ends life and all possibilities. They are both real; but the second one ends one kind of life and begins another. The image of a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying to produce

new life is the way Jesus taught us about this truth.

There are two kinds of life: resuscitated life and resurrected life. The first is that restoration that occurs when someone is clinically dead and then brought back. Perhaps the story of Lazarus is an example. Resurrected life is not this. It is no restoration of one's old life, but the reception of a radically new life. Lazarus got his old life back with sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus did not get his old life back. Easter is about paschal death and resurrected life. For living mature Christian people everything depends on getting this right.

Christ spoke of many daily deaths and of many risings. These are the reality of the Paschal Mystery and the secret to life and ultimate happiness.

We die so often, but rarely do we recognize it and integrate into the paschal mystery. We die to our youth. You get up one morning and look in the mirror and no matter what cosmetics you employ, or what surgeon you see, or diet you begin, something is gone. You can either grieve that loss for the rest of your life, or you can recognize that even without youth your life is good, full, and joyful.

We die to our wholeness. People who have been abused, raped, betrayed in love, wake up someday and realize that something has died inside them. They can either become bitter, angry, and filled with rage and hate, or rise in the Paschal mystery.

We die sometimes to our dreams. We hear about this in the Gospel as those disciples walked to Emmaus and said: "We had hoped that...." We have all experienced that death, that collapse of our dreams about how things might be for us and it can leave us empty and useless, or we can rise in the Paschal mystery.

The honeymoon of our lives dies, and the excitement, the passion, the interest that was there at first, in marriage, in parenting, in a new vocation begins to look like hard work. We either collapse or grow weary, or we find in the Paschal mystery something richer, deeper and fuller in spirit.

In our culture we experience and celebrate Easter with springtime and eggs, bunnies and lilies. In our faith we experience and celebrate Easter as the Paschal Mystery that takes us from death to new life leading us through times of confusion, doubt, and grieving to the time of letting go, and the moment of embracing a spirit filled new life. This is the Paschal Mystery. It is where Jesus would lead us. Look at the lives of those who first followed him. They are as much the point of the Easter Gospel as Jesus. Consider what happened to them because of this mystery, and believe not just that Christ rose from the dead; but that it can happen to you as well. We do not just die a thousand deaths without rising to new and fuller lives. This is the promise God has made to us, and that promise is being kept.

Audio Available

367

2nd Sunday of Easter

3/30/2008

Acts 2: 42-27 + Psalm 118 + 1 Peter 1:3-9 + John 20: 19-31

Fr. Boyer

Every year on the Sunday after Easter we tell this story. If I asked you to quote Thomas the Apostle, I would bet the debt of this church that all but a handful of you would only be able to say: "My Lord and my God" or "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in his side, I will not believe." If that was all Thomas had to teach us, the lesson would be simple: "Be careful what you ask for."

This is also the Apostle who said: "Lord, we do not know where you are going." And even more courageously when Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, Thomas said to his apostolic companions: "Let us go with him and die with him." No one ever remembers his moment of courage, but his moment of doubt is unforgettable. We all know what it's like - you do fifty things well, make one mistake, and that's all people can talk about. Why is that? Some trick to deflect attention from ourselves? I suspect so. How interesting it is for a less than perfect human church to tell the story of a doubting apostle. But the story is told year after year, and I believe it is so because there is something important for Thomas to teach us.

First, Thomas teaches us that faith does not exclude doubt and questions, nor does it exclude moments when we wonder whether God is truly with us and faithful to God's promises. Our experience in life leaves us very aware that God can seem distant and unresponsive. Illness strikes, a job is lost, a home burns, a loved one dies and we wonder where God has gone. Real Faith is never clear and unchallenged. Faith may lead to certitude, but not always a comfortable certitude of logic and proof. Most of the time, it is the certitude of one who trusts, not one who knows.

Second, Thomas teaches us that we receive faith in and through the community of parents, friends, and church. It is not a private matter. Thomas found faith because he returned to the community and trusted enough to show up the following Sunday. Ultimately, he testifies to the facet that our faith must be rooted in our own experience of God, in a personal acceptance of God and commitment to God. We cannot simply believe because someone else believes. Our faith must be founded in our own deepest convictions.

Third Thomas teaches us that faith is not simply an assent to doctrines and propositions. Thomas had no creed to accept. In fact, the apostle Thomas did not know the Apostles' Creed. He had no idea that Jesus had two natures united hypostatically in one person. He had not figured out that there were three persons in one God. He was totally unaware that 10 days earlier, at Jesus last supper, the bread and wine had been changed into the body and blood of Christ. Thomas would have flunked a quiz on first grade catechism. Yet he shows us that, while it is necessary to "believe that" certain doctrines are true, we must first "Believe in" God, the God revealed in Jesus. Thomas' faith was a personal response, a graced surrender to the risen Jesus as his lord and savior and an acknowledgement that Jesus spoke the truth when he said, "I have the power to lay down my life and take it up again." As John sees it in his Gospel, faith for Thomas was an expression of loyalty, faithfulness and allegiance to Jesus. It was a radical act of trust and a personal commitment to Jesus and Jesus' invitation to new life. Thomas teaches us that, in the end, we believe because we know we are loved. We believe in the one who loves us.

The Gospel story does not tell us whether Thomas put his fingers in the wounds of Jesus or touched his side, but he did meet Jesus face to face. That is how he heard the call to faith and where he found the strength to believe and live out that faith as an apostle and martyr. We are invited to meet the Lord face to face in work, sacrament, in community and in the poor and the needy. Christ is always in our minds inviting us to touch him and believe.

I think the church puts this Gospel before us every year to encourage and suggest that the risen Christ is still with us, and those troubled by doubts belong here. Thomas the Teacher suggests that they might only ask, and then look. Touching may not be important, but looking and seeing with love is the beginning of that faith we all admire and desire.

Audio Available

368

3rd Sunday of Easter

4/6/2008

Acts 2:14-33 + Ps 16:1-11 + 1 Pt 1:17-21 + Lk 24:13-35

Dcn. Byron

Audio Available

369

4th Sunday of Easter

4/13/2008

Acts 2:14-41 + Ps 23:1-6 + 1 Pt 2:20-25 + Jn 10:1-10

Fr. Boyer

This Sunday after Easter for many years has been called: "Vocation Sunday." It is not difficult to understand why having heard the readings for the day, but in recent years, I have heard people struggle with this opportunity because the reality of bad shepherds is no longer a remote possibility or some bad dream. You know me well enough after five years in this pulpit to know that I am not shy about the truth, make no effort to deny reality, and enjoy a good challenge now and then. On this past Friday, a Cathedral packed with people buried a Good Shepherd, and the night before, the parish church in Enid where he served as best he could in retirement was overflowing with people who recognized what a gift they had received from a faithful and gracious servant. It was not that he did all things well, but that he did them faithfully.

On Friday of this week, I will have been ordained forty years as a priest of the Archdiocese, and even though I have chosen to celebrate that with you in early June when our lives are less hectic with graduations, confirmation, first communions, and weddings, settling the arrangements for that occasion in the past couple of weeks has given me much to remember, to celebrate, and to think about. You will be hearing more about that in a few weeks, but I cannot pass up this chance to think out loud with you about these things in the context of what we have just heard proclaimed to us by lectors and deacon.

It is the end of Peter's great sermon on Pentecost that we proclaim today. If you'll remember I made the comment on Easter Sunday that there is little wonder his sermon was so great that day. He did not live long enough to preach on that event for forty years! I wonder if he would have managed to get away with giving the same one forty times! What amazes me however, is not what he said; but of course, the change that came over him in those forty days between Good Friday and Pentecost. What further amazes me is the response of the people: "Tell us what to do!" They cry out. Wow! have I ever wished that would happen around here! Since you have not in one voice shouted: "Tell us what to do." when I finish here each week. I've decided on Good Shepherd Sunday to tell you anyway!

Take Jesus Christ seriously. Stop wishing and talking about making a relationship with him first in your life. Do it now, and make it obvious. Bear witness to that relationship by how you use your gifts. If Christ is first in your life, then the first day of the week is His and there is no other place to be than in his presence among people who worship, praise, give thanks, and accept the gift of his forgiveness and his body and blood. If Christ is first in your life, your check book ought to show that. That's nothing to be ashamed of nor is it a secret. What you have comes from God. What you give in direct proportion to what you believe. There are people who don't like to hear that, but it's the truth. It is a way of imitating the generosity of God. We do it with time, with our talent, and our treasure: all three, not one or the other.

Young people, if you want Jesus Christ to be first in our life, then make it so. What Jesus would do in every situation is what matters first, not what someone else will think of you, or what everyone else is doing, unless that "everyone else" happens to be your church companions. If you have not yet decided what to do with your life, why don't you ask what God wants you to do with your life, since God gave it to you. It is not a matter of making a lot of money, of looking good, and having everything you want. It is a matter of being all that you can be, not having all you can have. I do not believe that we need to pray for

vocations, or ask God to call people to generous lives of service. That's silly and thoughtless. God has never stopped calling us by name. People have stopped listening to God, and they have not taken the courage to respond to the deepest movements in their souls.

In this parish three young people have gone to the seminary in the five years I have been here. One left after giving it a real try and have two stayed. Praise God for all three of them. They had courage. Their example raises questions. There are hundreds of young single people in this parish community. Where are they? Parents, have you left them at home when you promised to bring them up in the practice of the faith? Has the truth that there have been a few bad shepherds so spoiled the thought of generous and faithful commitment that there are only three in five years out of this huge parish? Is this culture so saturated with sex that a celibate life looks lonely and impossible empty and loveless? Has materialism and consumerism so seduced our children that we are left with an overworked, aged clergy and that continual prospect of closed churches? The fact of the matter is, we are as a church struggling with sexism, the limitations our tradition places upon us, and the painful effort of considering change while remaining faithful to the Holy Spirit. In the midst of all that, I do not believe that God has gone silent. I do believe we fail to listen.

Let me tell you a story, and then you think about it and my greatest hope after forty years of service as priest is that you will ask God: "What shall we do?"

A man and his wife came home from a short trip, and they noticed a message on their answering machine. The caller ID was from Alaska. This fact didn't excite them because it usually meant contact with the man's long-lost brother who called himself a prospector. Differences of opinion had created a separation between the two for years. As far as the family was concerned, the "prospector" would never amount to anything and they grew tired of him chasing unrealistic dreams with their money. They listened as a stranger's voice on the message said that the brother had died and someone from the family needed to come make arrangements. Reluctantly, the man and his wife loaded up the car and headed north. After seeing to a funeral, they went to a small, remote cabin to claim any of the brother's valuables before they left or the goods would be quickly claimed by someone else. Arriving at the run-down shack, they looked through the cupboards and chest of drawers, and packed up a few things they decided they should take with them. As they were leaving, they met rag-tag prospector walking up to the cabin. "You folks leaving?" he asked. They told him yes. "Well, did you clean out Artie's place?" "We took what we felt was worth taking and we're heading back." The old man asked if they minded if he took what was left, and they replied, "No, help yourself." The old man ambled up to the cabin, turned around and watched the dust roll out from under the car as it headed back to civilization. He went inside, moved a table to one side, picked up a board from the floor, and collected the bags of gold his friend had been gathering for years. "Too bad they didn't know Artie a little better," he said to himself.

Audio Available

370

5th Sunday of Easter

4/20/2008

Acts 6:1-7 + Psalm 33 + 1 Peter 2:4-9 + John 14:1-12

Fr. Boyer

I had an interesting experience early last week.

The person who manages my retirement account wanted to talk.

I made and kept an appointment and the conversation focused on my retirement.

How much I would need was the big question leading to some serious discussion about what to do with what I have saved as the present economy was calling for some review of the investment and saving plan.

"When are you going to retire?" was a question asked.

"How about the end of the week?" was my response.

By the end of the conversation that did not seem like a good plan, and so we agreed on some changes in allocations, and I went to lunch.

Most of us set goals along the way in our lives, and we spent a fair amount of time making plans to achieve those goals.

It strikes me that many of us spend a fair amount of time planning our future.

Parents of young children think about college education and saving for it.

Young people save money for buying their first big ticket item: often a car.

There is something about the times in which we live

that makes thinking about and planning about the future

beyond the limits of life as we know it here a little bit old fashioned.

The individualism that plagues our life time,

the materialism and the need for instant gratification which marks this age,

and the consumerism that drives our economy with all its uncertainties

makes planning and thinking about what happens next

once we have run the course of our lives here too much trouble to think about.

A serious study of this section of John's Gospel in chapter ten

brings all of this to mind today as we hear the apostles

being forced to think about their future.

They are uncomfortable because it is beginning to dawn on them

that the future without the immediate companionship of Jesus

is going to demand some changes in their lives and their way of thinking,

not unlike the times in which we live.

Things are going to change on this earth, in this country and in this church.

How we face that is something we might learn from Thomas and Philip.

To begin with, fear is not appropriate for those who believe

and have set their lives on the Gospel teachings of Jesus Christ.

"Have no fear" Jesus says. "I am taking care of you."

But holding to this conviction is not an excuse for failing to plan and change.

The disciples are thinking of other things and so they do not get the message.

Jesus says he is leaving and going away.

This disturbs the disciples. Their relationship is powerful, hopeful, and personal.
They think he is going to some place,
and they want to know where so they can follow.
What unfolds from this discourse
is that the focus of their faith and their hope and their lives
is not a matter of place but of person.
"Show us the way." says Thomas. "I AM THE WAY" says Jesus.

It is easy to understand their initial confusion since he says:
"I am going to prepare a place for you."
However in the very next breath he says: "I will take you to myself."

Jesus is the place.
He is going to the Father, he says,
and that is where he will lead them and any who will come to him.
Philip speaks up, perhaps because he is starting to get the point and he says:
"Show us the Father." and the response of Jesus says: "See me, see the Father."

Two weeks away from our celebration of Pentecost, we are encouraged by the Church's readings to think about the future, to look ahead, to plan and prepare.
If we believe there is a future, then making plans for it ought to be more important than the plans for our retirement, since that future will last a lot longer.
Preparing for their future meant making some big changes for Thomas, Philip, and their companions.
We call that conversion,
and the experience of the early church tells very plainly
how that happened by the power of the Spirit.
We too may face our future with the help of that same spirit
Perhaps in the days to come anticipating our celebration of that Spirit's coming
we might make a prayer out of the plea of Thomas and of Phillip.
"Show us the way." "Show us the Father."

Think of this Gospel with this story.
A very wealthy man died and went to heaven.
He was met at the Pearly Gates by St Peter and led down golden streets to the residential section to claim his new home.
They passed many mansions:
huge, splendid, and with great green lawns in front.
At the end of the street they stopped in front of a windowless shack
built out of old leftover and used plywood panels.
The rich man asked St Peter why he was getting this hovel
when there were so many beautiful mansions he could live in.
St Peter replied, "I did the best with what you sent us."

Audio Available

371
Confirmation 2008
4/25/2008

Abp. Beltran

Audio Available

372

6th Sunday of Easter

4/27/2008

Acts 17: 22-31 + Psalm 66 + 1 Peter 3: 13:22 + John 14:15-21

Fr. Boyer

The point here is not: "Jesus is going to God and when they die, the disciples will go to God and be reunited to him."

The point here is: once he has died as is no longer physically present among them, he will not be gone. He will be present to them in and through the Spirit in the depth of their own beings.

They are not being encouraged to hope for life after death.

They are being instructed and led into a consciousness change, a serious, important, life-giving, hope giving change that will lead them to become aware of spiritual presence without physical manifestation.

It that sounds goofy to you or sounds like proposing a séance, then good, because if it leads you think more deeply, question more profoundly, and desire more passionately, then you are beginning to think outside of this world; and that is a good thing.

We must not be content with or settle down this world.

In the larger context of this Chapter, Jesus is at prayer with the Father about taking us out of this world.

This world does not think about nor conceive of the Spirit.

Our difficulty is that we are "of this world", and Jesus says that this world does not know of the reality of the Spirit.

This world is alienated from the spiritual partially because it is addicted to the sense knowledge.

When the physical sights and sounds of people are not present to us, we assume, as "worldly beings," they are gone.

Jesus would have us question that assumption.

That was the problem revealed in the story of Thomas the Apostle.

He only wanted knowledge that came from touching.

When you begin to step out of this world, you begin to understand that while death might separate us from loved ones, in another and more ultimate sense it deepens our spiritual union with them.

When we try to ponder this, our minds block because we get stuck in this world, and too much of our time, our consciousness, and our energy is spent on this world. When we stop long enough to get the bigger picture, a life time in this world is not much compared to eternity, and this is the point at which we find the disciples. They right at the turning point, the change point when they are being invited to experience the world of the Spirit instead of a brief brush with the world of the flesh (to use Paul's language) they hesitate, and Jesus steps in to call them onward.

There is a wonderful piece of wisdom in a 1998 movie: "Hope Floats".

Dumped on a TV talk show by her husband of several years, Birdee Pruitt, returned to her hometown along with her daughter Berniece. Only with difficulty did she adjust to a new life without her husband and to a life again under her mother's roof, among friends and acquaintances in the town of Smithville, Texas. Eventually, peace and acceptance and then new love come into her life. One day after the death of her mother, she passes on a bit of wisdom she learned from her mother to her daughter, Berniece.

"Momma says that beginnings are scary, endings are usually sad, but it's the middle that counts the most. Try to remember that when you find yourself at a new beginning. Just give hope a chance to float

up. And it will.

The disciples are in the middle in John 14, and so are we.

This is the "hope time", and it is sustained and realized by our ability to experience the Spirit, by our connection to or our "Communion" with a presence that is not of this world.

Our breakthrough can come when we understand how this Spirit works and how this spirit is expressed and experienced.

What Jesus instructs in Chapter 14 of John's Gospel is that the Spirit, the on going and real presence of Jesus who is still with us is known when His work is continued and his mission is advanced.

When we forgive one another, Jesus is here.

When the hungry are fed one at a time or by the thousands, Jesus is here.

When those passed by on the road of life are picked up and provided for, Jesus is here. When we do things we never thought we could, Jesus is here. We simply need to remember these things, to believe His Word, to act on his command.

There are two unmistakable signs of the Spirit's presence.

The Spirit calls us to the Church. If any thing we do, or any choice we make leads us away from communion, leads us to interact with fewer and fewer of God's people in worship, in learning, in sacraments then it is a bad choice and ultimately blocks the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit calls us to wholeness, to integrity, to Joy. To put it simply, if our lives are empty and we feel that something is missing, then something is. The life of grace is not always a life of pleasure and comfort, simply because real love is always about sacrifice. But when followed honestly and faithfully, it will feel right because it is.

These are middle days for us. We are Easter People living with Hope.

"It is not good for man to be alone." says the author of Genesis.

But these are good days, so we must not be alone.

Audio Available

373

The Ascension of the Lord

5/6/2008

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

374

Pentecost

5/11/2008

Acts 2: 1-11 + Psalm 104 + 1 Corinthians 12: 3-7, 12-14 + John 20: 19-23

Fr. Boyer

There always seems to be some level of fascination with the images and details that Luke provides in Acts of the Apostles and the story of what happened that day in Jerusalem. Any discussion about this event and the Holy Spirit inevitably begins to address the detail that describes the communication - the speaking in tongues that occurred and brought so many to the point of conversion that day.

While it is only natural to be fascinated by the curious, it gets us no where near understanding and experiencing the Holy Spirit to think that somehow the Spirit's presence is confirmed by the ability of people to speak foreign languages. To sit and wonder: "How did they do that?" is to my mind a little off the mark. Scholars seem to be of the opinion that Luke is indicating some miraculous event, but I am not convinced that the miracle is simply found with the apostles suddenly able to speak several languages. In itself the ability to suddenly be able to speak a different language could only cause admiration or fascination. This miracle caused more than that.

The miracle here is not only about the Apostles. There was a miracle; but it was as much a miracle of hearing as it was of speaking, and that makes a difference. Had the crowd not heard; had they not understood; the speaking miracle would have simply been something odd and curious. This manifestation of the Holy Spirit then, it seems to me, is not found in something the apostles did, or simply in something that happened to them; but also and more so in a change that happened in the hearts and the minds of those who heard those apostles. The shift from curiosity on their part to faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. As with all of the miracles though, the exact nature of it is less important than the meaning. "How did they do that?" is a silly question if you never ask: "What does it mean?"

At the point of asking the real question, we are face to face with the meaning of the Spirit's presence. It has more to do with understanding than with speaking in tongues. I don't think we should view Pentecost as a magical event. To keep us from doing so, the church puts before us today two stories of the Spirit's coming: one with a mighty wind, the other with a gentle breath. There are times when we experience the Spirit in sudden and surprising ways that may change our lives in a moment; but more often the Spirit is that quiet breath that gradually and eventually leads us to understand because we've been listening.

Most of our lives are spent struggling to find and discern where and what God is calling us toward. Many of us are not so much burning with the Holy Spirit, but burn-out by the demands of our times. Like disciples locked in rooms of fear or depression we cannot imagine that we might ever live differently. Or we are like the crowds running from one thrill to the next hardly ever stopping long enough to listen, to hear what God might be saying to us or calling us to become.

The miracle of Pentecost is not found in wind or tongues. It is found in lives set free from fear and in people who can hear God's call and because of that call think outside the self imposed limits we place on ourselves. These are people who do things, think things, and dream things greater than they have known in the past. These Spirit-filled ones become the church, the people of God rather than people of this world.

These are people who are wise and see the world as God sees it. They know their opinion is not

necessarily the best angle on the whole truth. This wisdom is not always practical, but it is possible. These people have understanding. They are turned upside down so they see the world as God sees it. These are people free of confusion and dissension because they can stand under others thinking what they think and feeling what they feel.

These are people of knowledge free of ignorance and narrow mindedness.

They have the gift of counsel. They do not suffer the loneliness of personal decisions. They give comfort, hope, and direction to others. They have holy and wholesome advise.

The Spirit filled are steadfast and consistent. With this gift of fortitude, they choose the good no matter what.

These people, filled with wonder are pushed to be more like God who continually amazes us.

This day, Pentecost reminds us of the power and possibilities of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our world. It allows to go far beyond what human beings can do on their own. The Spirit has been given we proclaim today. That Spirit works wonders wherever human hearts are open to its movement. The earth is renewed each time rivalries are resolved; distinctions are recognized as merely expressions of diversity; peace is restored; comfort and solace are offered, forgiveness is granted. We are full of that Spirit. When we open ourselves to that Spirit, it will be like the opening of the doors of that upper room. We will never be the same.

Audio Available

375

Most Holy Trinity

5/18/2008

Exodus 34: 4-6, 8-9 + Daniel 2: 52-55 + 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13 + John 3: 16-18

Fr. Boyer

Last week I drove to Tulsa to give a talk, and Brian, a seminary student from the parish went along to do some driving since I wanted to come back late in the evening after the talk. It was a nice ride and conversation and I questioned him about what he learning and studying in school. Since it is nearly five decades since I was at that level of education, I had some curiosity. To my surprise, things have changed, but at the same time, not much!

A contemporary of mine was recently reflecting on our theological studies which Brian will soon begin, and I was wondering earlier this week what that part of his education will be like as I tried desperately to remember what I learned in the seminary about the Holy Trinity. I remember all the things that don't help. I remember that that class met at 7:30 am. It was dark most of the year at that hour. Try to imagine a room full of 22 year olds sitting together at that hour through a lecture on the Holy Trinity. Courage was not the least of that professor's gifts. I remember how bored I was or how boring the professor was, I'm not sure which was the cause; but I can you this much, at the risk of casing scandal, at age 22 I wasn't very interested. The treatise on the Trinity was the Rubik's cube of theology, summarized this way (I actually still have my notes): four relations, three Persons, two processions, one God, and no proof; and I would add, little relevance to my spiritual life at the time.

There is not much information on the Trinity from the Bible, and especially in the readings assigned to this day. John 3:16 is an important text which many Christians, stick on the bumpers, hold up on cards at football games, and quote by memory. I know this since a person who sideswiped my car this past week while talking on a cell phone had John 3:16 on the bumper of their car. I just a few words, John 3:16 sums it all up as far as we are concerned who live in the post-resurrection era remembering and deepening our understanding of what has happened to us because of God's Love. But it isn't going to provide much information about the central mystery of Christian Faith.

What these reading do is point to the experience that will lead us into the mystery of the Trinity because the Trinity is not about equations or Metaphysical expressions. It is about love: God-love, Divine Love. The Gospel of John does not present a theology of non-Christian religions but is written both for fence-sitters like Nicodemus (who is being addressed in the third chapter) and for John's persecuted community. This text is abused when used to condemn non believers. It is a gift of hope for us who are believers; hope that we are loved by a distant God but by one whose Son offered up the very life of God for our sake.

It is love that leads us into the mystery of the Trinity and what it reveals to us about God. We proclaim, we worship, we believe in a God who is love, and because of that love, there is a relationship in which we believe in a God with whom there is trust, confidence, and strangest of all, of affection. Our God acts toward us with affection asking for a response, and the only word describe that response if "love."

Suddenly then we are not God's creatures, we are God's children. We share in God's life. That means that it is not only God's nature to know and to love creatively, it is our nature as well. If we are ever to become what we have been created to be, fully what God intended, then we live out our lives in likeness to God. We must become a true community, in which each member both creates and is created by the

others, a community in which each member sees in others the perfection of God, so perfectly reflected that love is the only possible bond.

The more this revelation sinks into our hearts and our minds and our souls, the more powerfully the Spirit will have filled us, and the more we shall be led into the light in profound unity and reconciliation.

Yesterday afternoon I held the son of young woman I have known since she was about 12 years old. Her husband was standing behind her. I looked in to the eyes of that 8 month old beautiful child, and I said, he has his father's eyes. When we find ourselves looking into each other's eyes and able to see the eyes of God and see with the eyes of God, we shall have entered into the mystery of the Trinity; the mystery of God's love which is not a closed circle. It has been broken open by the Incarnation in order to draw us into a new creation in which we shall have eternal life.

This is what we believe: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Audio Available

376

Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

5/25/2008

Dt 8:2-16 + Ps 147:12-20 + 1 Cor 10:16-17 + Jn 6:51-58

Fr. Boyer

The Corinthians had a problem which Paul addresses today. They were great at receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, but a little short of becoming the Body and Blood of Christ.

Two thousand years later that problem remains a challenge for us all.

Whether we eat, adore, receive, and worship the Body of Christ is of no avail if we do not become the Body of Christ.

The meaning of Eucharistic Spirituality must center on what we become because of what we do. Sitting in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament must make us more like the one whose presence is the focus of our gaze.

Receiving the Body of Christ must make us more like the one whose body and blood we consume.

A few weeks back at First Communion, I said to the children:

"You become what you touch."

The becoming is what communion is all about:

becoming one with others,

becoming Christ's presence in this world.

That is the motive, the consequence,

and the reality of what we are doing here.

The struggle of the church in Corinth is no different from the struggle of the Apostles to understand what it was they were being called to become by this one who told them he would be betrayed, broken, beaten, and killed. They wanted nothing to do with that idea. They wanted power, authority, and privilege. They quarreled among themselves who would be in charge after Christ had gone, all the while ignoring the life into which he wanted to initiate them.

The Corinthians too failed to get the point. Self satisfied, comfortable in their ways, attentive to their friends and those who could do something for them, they gathered easily for Eucharist, looking around for those they knew, and of course, hoping they would be noticed by others. All the while ignoring the poor and the hungry while they passed the plate among themselves for more than a second helping. For them the assembly had become a time to get something; for them the Eucharist was something to receive. This must not happen to us. We have more than Paul to remind us that have not come here to get something whether it's a good feeling or a good time. We cannot arrive with our hands out ready to take. First Jesus, then Paul, then two thousands years of tradition says to us that we are here to become something or someone; and this day called: "Corpus Christi" for a time in our history and then the "Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ" is our reminder.

We can best understand this truth by paying attention to what we are given: something that has been broken. We do not receive the whole thing. We do not get something that is perfect. Broken is the point here. Broken is the life there (pointing to the crucifix). Broken to broken; a broken piece for broken lives; a broken Christ for broken people. Our brokenness becomes His brokenness so that his wholeness can become ours. It is not until we have broken or lives in service, in love, or even in sin that this Eucharistic miracle can truly and wonderfully happen. It is not until we have nothing left, until we cling to nothing more, until we have surrendered all our pomp, power, and pride that the one most humiliated and most

broken of all can transform us into a Eucharistic people.

That is what Paul would have the Corinthians become, and so it must be for us. The wholeness, the unity, the oneness that the Eucharist symbolizes is not just unity with Christ, nor just unity among us, but a wholeness within that comes from healing and forgiveness. It establishes a unity that is greater than this church. The Corinthians did not seem to understand that until Paul spoke to them. This is a unity we must have with the poor and the helpless, those left behind, those who have no power, influence, no voice, or no home; refugees and immigrants included. We may not assume that the unity established by this sacrament is with those who are like us. We would need no sacramental challenge or grace for that accomplishment. The sacrament calls us to unity with those who are NOT like us, with those who have broken away, or feel left behind.

On a Saturday in April I said to the seven year olds here for their First Communion: "You become what you touch." The children understood that, and we can go deeper with that thought. In the Incarnation, God touched human nature and the Word become Flesh; and we began to reflect the Divine Image by which we have been touched. Jesus spent his life touching people who were blind, lame, deaf, bleeding, dead, lost, sinful, alone, and sick, and by that touch, they became whole and were restored to the human family. We are a broken people who shall reach out and touch and be touched by love broken for us. It is the miracle of the Eucharist, the Body of Christ. This miracle is as much about what we are becoming here as it is about bread becoming body and wine becoming blood. The Real Presence then is not simply here in a tabernacle if we are truly becoming.....

Audio Available

377

Ordinary Time 9

6/1/2008

Dt 11:18-32 + Ps 31:2-25 + Rom 3:21-28 + Mt 7:21-27

Fr. Mullen

Audio Available

378

Ordinary Time 10

6/8/2008

Hosea 6: 3- 6 + Psalm 50 + Romans 4: 18-25 + Matthew 9: 9-13

Fr. Boyer

By the time the prophet Hosea is writing and preaching, the Hebrews had taken the revelation to Moses on Mt Sinai and made a fine system of law and ritual that was complex and detailed. They had pretty well put out the fire of that burning bush. In place of some real fire, they simply had their rules and an ethic and creed that shaped their morality. No wonder they could walk past a fellow human being that had been beaten, robbed, and left to die on the side of road. They put all their confidence in that law and shaped morality around it; but Hosea tells them that this falls short of the radical morality in God's design. Through Hosea, God complains that he is tired of their superficiality and the formalism of their law-keeping. It was as though they thought they could save themselves by keeping the law, as though not killing, not making idols, not dishonoring one's parents, or stealing was the whole heart of morality and goodness.

Hosea was marginally effective, but only for a time. It was and still is easier to be law abiding than merciful; easier to just keep the rules than trouble oneself about misery or the suffering of another. Enter Jesus Christ, the Word Made Flesh!

He troubles the rule-keepers who question his judgment about Matthew; and he quotes Hosea back them when they question his company. The morality, the ethics with which Jesus of Nazareth teaches and by which he lives are not rooted in law, but in mercy, for this is the face of God he reveals, a face of mercy.

This message and story bears frequent repetition until we get it right. In our retelling of this story, we find ourselves reliving this behavior hiding in this superficial morality with an ethic that is self protecting and self serving. It is easier to keep the rules than look past them or look into the face of suffering. Easier to just go to church, get it over with, and go home rather than learn the meaning of mercy. It is easier to lock up drug offenders and single moms than figure out the cause of their misery and suffering that led them to the drugs in the first place. It is easier to say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys than make a significant change in ones life, attitude, or thinking. It's easier to throw some pocket change, a couple of bucks into that basket than make a life changing loving grateful commitment to stewardship's tithing. It is easier to break up families and deport the so called "illegal" than do something about the misery they flee.

This Gospel today is Mercy in your face. "Go and learn the meaning of it." says Jesus to the good rule keepers. Matthew, a sinner like any and all of us, is invited into the school of mercy. "Follow Me." is not an invitation to go for a walk. It is an opportunity to learn mercy, and if we kept on reading Matthew's ninth chapter, we would get the point. For as soon as the conversation ends here a synagogue official rushes up and begs Jesus to come and save his daughter. The disciples follow Jesus to that home where Jesus is ridiculed and laughed at by a crowd who are more interested in their wailing than the presence of mercy. He puts them out - because they have blocked themselves off from life. Imagine, they laugh and scoff at mercy. Opponents of the death penalty know what that's like, but we have been invited to learn the meaning of Mercy, so we must not laugh, but learn.

Those disciples who have tagged along are not put outside, but they stay in the house and see what happens when divine desire follows the cry of suffering. They learn there not only how to desire mercy;

but how to become mercy. Yet it does not end there, for immediately Jesus returns to the crowds outside and a woman of suffering touches the hem of his garment to teach one more time the lesson of mercy. It's about desire. It is a quality of the divine that Jesus reveals in these verses of Matthew's Gospel.

What we must learn is that mercy is not a single act, my friends. It is a way of life. It is like the sea in which we swim. It gives us hope every day, all day. The stories of this chapter on mercy suggest that what brings mercy is desire.

We are a Matthew people, busy at our jobs, sitting at our desks, moving money around, taking all we can get however we can get it. I think that Matthew was just waiting for Jesus to come by. He gets up all too quickly. I think he was ready and waiting for the call, and when invited to follow Jesus it was no invitation to go somewhere, but an invitation to learn the meaning of mercy which is not an intellectual exercise or a rational argument. It is a matter of following along watching and listening to Jesus in action and then ever so slowly becoming mercy filled ourselves. When that day comes, and this could be it, we will put down the rocks with which we might righteously stone others and cease the laughter that mocks mercy remembering that we are all in need of mercy, and there is plenty to go around if we will just give what we expect and so desire to receive.

Audio Available

Ex 19:2-6 + Ps 100:1-5 + Rom 5:6-11 + Mt 9:36-10:8

Fr. Boyer

You can almost sense the pace at which he is moving. There is no suggestion that he was on a stroll around the countryside enjoying the scenery. He was motivated and on the move. He was not in some of the towns and villages, he was in them all, and Matthew tells us what kept him going: compassion. He saw something wrong and set about the business of doing something about it. What he saw, he knew should not be happening. Those who should have been doing something were not, so he did. That is what is going on here. This is what Matthew leads us into – a revelation of what one's identity as a follower and disciple of Christ must be: people of compassion who see something wrong and make it right.

What is revealed here is not the mission of Jesus Christ, but the mission God has planned for God's people. Jesus is clever when he invites these people to pray for laborers. He knows that if they do so, it will gradually dawn upon them that they are the laborers for which they are praying. It will finally become clear to them that blaming someone else for the way things are while doing nothing about it one's self is more of a problem than the fact that no one is doing anything.

We have become a culture of blame, our children learn it early on. Our leaders do it all the time, passing the blame from one party to the other, and from one country to another. The consequence of all this blame is all the more problematic because we are becoming numb to the disasters and problem around us. The media brings a typhoon one day and an earthquake the next. The homeless in our country because of mortgage failures is eclipsed by the homeless in another place because of floods, and the more we watch, the more numb we become and then caught up in that numbness, we do nothing except wonder: "Why doesn't someone do something?"

Into that mess of paralysis comes Matthew chapter nine and what it reveals. The "someone" who can do something about almost everything sits in this church in the presence of the Lord, being taught by his Word, and called by his grace. Our prayer here must not be for the Lord to send laborers unless we are willing to get up and labor. What the disciples discovered is what we must also discover: we are the ones called and sent, disturbed by compassion and strengthened by grace.

We think about vocations to the priesthood as though it should be someone else's job, as though it should be some other country or culture who should come here and provide for us what we will not provide for ourselves.

We look at the failure of health care, of education, of transportation, and it's failure we are looking at: and at best we wonder why someone will not fix the problem. At worst, we have become so paralyzed by the complexity and conflicting solutions that we don't even ask anymore.

We do have that luxury. We do not have a call to be served or be waited upon. We have no privilege except the privilege of faith, and it's call to service, to responsibility, and to an identity that in every life bears some obvious and serious resemblance to the life of Jesus Christ. We cannot allow ourselves to be anesthetized to the pain of this world. Compassion must still and always stir in the depths of our hearts, and when it does, we shall be moving around to all the towns and villages and know that we have what it takes to experience the Kingdom of Heaven. We find here, we celebrate here, and live it out there

today and everyday.
Audio Available

380

Ordinary Time 11 (Boyer 40th Anniversary)

6/15/2008

11:00 AM

Ex 19:2-6 + Ps 100:1-5 + Rom 5:6-11 + Mt 9:36-10:8

Abbot Gregory Polan

Audio Available

381

Ordinary Time 12

6/22/2008

Jer 20:10-13 + Ps 69:8-35 + Rom 5:12-15 + Mt 10:26-33

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

Acts 12: 1-11 + Psalm 34 + Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18 + Matthew 16:13-19

Fr. Boyer

A fisherman and a tent maker are put before us by the universal church on this date every year. They are an "odd couple" just as unlikely a pair as the characters portrayed by Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon in that film, "The Odd Couple" that came out in 1968, forty years ago! One is a neat-freak and the other a slob. Separated from their wives and families, they end up sharing an apartment together. At the risk of trivializing Peter and Paul, it strikes me that the two of them are in some ways quite like the characters in that film. Peter, the neat freak wants everything done by the book and according to the rules. In a conflict over rule keeping, he appeals to James in Jerusalem to settle a dispute. It's a classic conflict: keep the letter of the law or bend the letter to discover the spirit and purpose of the law. Then there is Paul, who in some ways is the other character. He stirs up things, brings in gentiles and gets everything confused for those who liked things neat and orderly.

It strikes me that the two of them a still a good image of our church today: a people who are both Peter and Paul, a people who need things neat and yet a people who can live with a little mess; a people who lean to the right and lean to the left; rule keepers and makers, and rule benders or breakers. Regardless of those differences, there is a fidelity to Jesus Christ and His mission that is indistinguishable, and we find in them both a passion for the Gospel's Good News, and the Kingdom of God as Jesus proclaimed it and as they experienced with him; a kingdom of forgiveness and mercy, of justice and peace.

They are real people, this fisherman and this tent maker. They both spent time in prison, but as Paul points out in one of his epistles, "nothing can imprison the Word of the Lord." So, in spite of the extraordinary precautions of double chains and a large contingent of guards, Peter gets out. No force of this world is stronger than the force of the church at prayer says the story we've just read in Acts of the Apostles. What we see here is that the prayer of a Spirit filled community is greater than Herod's soldiers. Perhaps Luke in recording this incident would want us to get that point.

It also occurs to me that there is much of Peter and Paul in each of us as well as in our church. We are, every one of us, a people not terribly consistent nor perfectly tuned to the mission to which we have been called in faith. Peter with his denials, his inattentive dozing while Jesus is in agony, and Paul with his outright persecution of believers fairly well describe the kind of people who have been entrusted with the mission of Christ so powerfully suggested by the image of the keys. Neither Peter nor Paul got off to a great start, but it's how they ended that matters. We find in their story the truth that it is never too late to change, there is nothing we have done that is so awful or unfaithful that God's grace cannot help us move beyond, and when we do wonderful things can happen in and through us.

Peter and Paul are in the end, nothing more than you and me. Human beings, graced, touched by God's hand. Like Peter, we sleep too much, and sometimes we have to shaken awake. Who knows, it might well be an angel that does so: an angel that looks like a tragedy or a near calamity, or maybe just a sudden insight and moment of clarity. The truth we proclaim here is not about historical figures of Peter and Paul; but about you and me, called and chosen by God formed by the blood of Christ into church for the sake of sacrifice and service, reconciliation and healing.

God is at work in us no less than in Paul and in Peter. These men call us today to make their lives and their deaths worthwhile by continuing the mission for which they gave all. We are the Timothy Paul so

treasures and instructs. We testify to the world and to one another. We speak always for the holiness of life – of all life even in a world where it often seems impossible to effect much change.

If we have even a portion of the same Spirit that filled these two, we do not and cannot be silent in the face of injustice. Our deeds must match our words, and our values must match our vision. The Spirit of the Risen Christ will break any chain and open the door of anything that imprisons us. By that Spirit, we can and we must become attentive to the consequences of our decisions every minute of every day. Our lives will be the sermon we preach. We shall begin to question and cry out when price of gasoline takes food away from hungry children whose parents work hard while oil companies post record incomes and pay dividends from their profits leaving out those who have nothing with which to buy the stock and share the profit. We shall pass up cheap shirts that put others out of work, and we shall pay attention when people like animals are exploited for the profit of those who need no more profit. The unemployed and the uninsured are the concern of everyone when the Spirit of the Risen Christ has seized the hearts and minds of faithful people who are awake and not held captive by the powerful of this world.

A fisherman and a tent maker stand before us today as the freest people on the face of this earth. They were not rich, and they had no power. Yet they did not succumb to feelings of helplessness, and they never found silence convenient. It should be so for us: a people who share their faith, their humble beginnings and stumbling efforts. They lived and died in Rome – the seat of all earthly power. It was the most powerful and most wealthy nation on earth. They stood in the face of that power, and two thousand year later all that power is gone but the Spirit they shared, that unlikely pair still lives in you and me regardless of the superficial differences we may have about what's neat and what's messy, what is good and what is better.

There is a power that can change the world in us, and it will do so even as it changes us from within. For that Spirit we should give thanks, and then be set free.

Audio Available

Zechariah 9: 9-10 + Psalm 145 + Romans 8, 9, 11-13 + Matthew 11: 25-30

Fr. Boyer

With this Sunday we begin to hear one of the most important chapters in the New Testament: the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Five consecutive weeks will allow us to explore how Christian Spirituality draws one into "Life in the Spirit." As I said last weekend on the Feast of Peter and Paul, the Holy Father has declared this to be the year of Paul, and he has called us to deepen our knowledge, refresh our spirituality, and enjoy the wisdom of Paul. Some have said that the Eastern and Orthodox churches are the church of John; that the Western Roman Church is the church of Peter, and that the Protestant churches are the church of Paul. While stereotypes ought to always make us uncomfortable and suspicious; this one at least gives us reason to wonder if there might be some tiny element that gives reason for such a sweeping idea. Celebrating and living through a year of Paul ought to challenge that idea for us who assemble week after week and hear Paul proclaimed more often than any other New Testament writer. So it is to Paul's Roman Epistle that I turn your attention today and in the four weeks to come.

Paul is not writing to a church he has visited or founded, but to a church he hopes to visit in the future. He is not writing to correct or address some difficulty in a local church; but to lay a foundation for their lives in Christ and his future ministry among them. What we get is the most systematic treatment of spiritual life in all the New Testament. Fear and threats are not his tools for motivating obedience and holiness of life, but rather gratitude for what God has done and for what God will do is uppermost in his mind.

In this eighth chapter, the word "Spirit" occurs 18 times. If that doesn't tell you what the point is, nothing will. You have just heard what may well be the most powerful, most important, and most comforting yet challenging words in the whole bible: "Brothers and Sisters, You are in the Spirit!" In several other epistles, he says: "Do not quench the Spirit!" But look at us..... is there enough evidence of that Spirit to confirm the truth of what Paul says? The Spirit that Paul speaks of nurtures a spirituality that is the consequence of an invasion, not an imitation. We are not called to be imitations of the saints because the implication of an imitation is that it is a fake! We are called to be real to be Spirit filled and Spirit living. The Spirit as Paul sees it invades us. It takes us over and lifts us out of the ordinary into the heavenly world. That Spirit transcends the mundane and gives us a way of looking at this world and it's challenges and limitations with an eye to the future.

What does it mean to be a child of God? That's the issue Paul raises in the letter to the Romans. For a Pauline Christian, Jesus Christ is an event. While he has some interest in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, his focus is what happened to us because of Jesus Christ. Three things he suggests:

We have knowledge of God

We know an appropriate way to live.

We know God's will for the future of the world.

When Paul contrasts the law and the spirit, what he teaches and reveals is that only the Spirit can redeem and save. The law cannot do this. The Law cannot defeat sin, it can only detect it.

Just keeping rules does not redeem and save. It takes more. It takes a life in the Spirit.

Paul speaks of obligation that springs from privilege. We are children of God. We are in the Spirit. This is

privilege. It is the privilege of believers, the privilege of faith. That Spirit leads us still today. It is not a spirit that drags us, but induces, entices, perhaps even seduces us to seek the things that are above, to value only that which gives life, not pleasure. The flesh, Paul says, is death - it is separation from God. The Spirit on the other hand is Life. Those who live in the Spirit live with the mind of God. If we understand Paul correctly, we do not need to receive the Spirit; we need to respond to the Spirit. We must be free to let that Spirit lead us with trust, faith, and obedience. The Spirit that dwells within us is the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead.

We all face two problems here: the problem of sin and the problem of righteousness. Our problem with sin is that we do it. Our problem with righteousness is that we do not and cannot. God solved the first problem with Calvary. Now in Romans chapter eight, we discover how to solve the second problem: Live in the Spirit as Children of God.

Audio Available

Isaiah 55: 10-11 + Psalm 65 + Romans 8:18-23 + Matthew 13: 1-23

Fr. Boyer

"Man who began in a cave behind a wind-break, will end in the diseased soaked ruins of a slum." says H.G. Wells.

Not so says Paul to the Romans. "We are saved by hope." The one blazing truth that lit life for Paul was the tremendous fact that the human situation is not a hopeless one. Paul picks up the words of Genesis 3:17, "Cursed be the ground because of you." God says to Adam after the sin. All of creation is soiled and ruined. Paul reflects upon the human condition and the state of the world as we can do any morning or any evening with CNN or the local news: disaster after disaster, murder, violence, abuse, theft, suffering innocent people, power abused, greed, and hatred day after day. In the face of that, Paul sees God's redeeming power, and the end of it all is hope. For Paul, and for those open to his words, life was not a weary, defeated waiting. It was rather, a throbbing, vivid expectation.

Those who live in the Spirit do not live only in that world, but they must endure a troubling tension in their lives: on one hand, they live in and by the Spirit. On the other, they live in a world that has not yet been set free from the ravages of sin. So, they live in Christ. They not only see that world, but they look beyond it to God. They not only see the consequences of sin, they see the power of God's mercy and love.

There is a divine plan, and Paul understands it. He writes to the Jewish Community at Rome and appeals to their imagination with ideas they understand from their tradition. He speaks to them of a filial privilege. He speaks to us today of our privilege as sons and daughters of God. For the Jews of his time, it stirs memories of Abraham and the inheritance he and Abraham's descendants were promised. For us this inheritance comes through Baptism and the power of that Spirit we have received. Sons and Daughters, Children of God we have an inheritance to come and we live in expectation of that gift.

Paul points to the mystery, the wonder of Christ as the pattern and plan of God for creation. Glory is the goal, a goal achieved by those who survive, endure, and are victorious through suffering. This "glory" Paul speaks of is nothing less than arriving at a likeness to God. We shall be deathless like God when we have risen like Christ in the resurrection. This is the glory that awaits us. We shall be conformed to the full glory of the risen Lord.

This is what we long for. This groaning, this frustration, comes from the inability to fulfill one's intended purpose. This is what creation groans for: the public manifestation of what we shall be. But it shall not come to pass until that day of resurrection, and it shall not be so for those who have not lived in the Spirit with their eyes fixed upon the goal, and their hearts longing and aching to be conformed to Christ so as to share with him the inheritance promised to us all.

Paul speaks to us as well as to the Romans about how and why we live in this world as it is, soiled, broken, sad, lonely, and sinful. He reminds us today that living in the Spirit will allow us to live surrounded by evil and not become evil; to be surrounded by sin and not become sinful; to be surrounded by violence and not become violent, to see suffering and not cause suffering. This is what it means to be in this world and not of this world. In as much as we can do this, we conform ourselves to Christ who was in this world, but not of this world. This is our part in God's plan and as much as we

remain faithful and hopeful, spirit filled and life-filled, we shall advance God's plan, as the first fruits of that Spirit which has been sown in us, the rich soil as we begin to hear and understand this Word of God. This world was not created to be that miserable slum H.G. Wells described; but by human sinfulness he can certainly describe it that way. Paul sees God's plan to restore creation with us in it to its first and original beauty as a reflection of the Divine Glory. The work of God has begun in Christ Jesus, and by the power of His Spirit in us, it will come to pass.

Audio Available

385

Ordinary Time 18

8/3/2008

Isaiah 55: 1-3 + Psalm 145 + Romans 8: 28-39 + Matthew 14: 13-21

Fr. Boyer

If God is for us who can be against us?

If God is for us..... who can be against us?

If God is for us.....who can be against us?

In an anxious age and to an anxious people, the message of Paul is welcome, but before its comfort can settle in, its challenge must be accepted.

We are an anxious people living in an anxious age.

The politics fear used so skillfully on us these days to tamper with precious human rights and mock our age old respect for refugees and immigrants are only two obvious signs.

A drug culture that lies at the root of immense human suffering is yet another sign of human anguish and anxiety dulled by alcohol abuse and every other chemical combination imaginable.

This is an anxious age.

Homes which ought to be sanctuaries where God dwells and lives in peace with people bound in love hold secrets of abuse and violence. Alarms and security systems are big business not just to protect human life, but to protect our stuff because we most often set them when we are gone, not when we're home.

We spent precious dollars protecting our children and examining the background of everyone who comes near them, and well we should says recent history. Because?

This is an anxious age.

Recorded airport announcements warn us to be on the outlook for people who are different from us or "act suspicious."

What does that mean?

It means, we're anxious and afraid.

It means that we live in an anxious age, and Paul addresses that in these verses from Romans 8.

First he invites us to look back and remember.

He reminds us of the gift of Christ - the gift that God has given us.

What God did NOT require of Abraham in the sacrifice of his own son, God DID offer his own for us.

Nowhere else in all his writings does Paul expose the vulnerability of God so tenderly. Paul constantly and consistently sees the complete interaction of humans in the divine plan and God's involvement in our lives. God's plan cannot be fulfilled without our cooperation, and we can never be fully human without God's incarnation into human life.

The secret to survival in the midst of anxiety, the source of courage in times of fear, and the reason for hope in times of tragedy and disappointment is to REMEMBER what God has done for us.

Those who falter, those who give up, those who are overwhelmed in the face of tragedy and trial have lost their memory, have forgotten all that has been revealed while those who bear all things in faith do so because "they know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him."

All of this is revealed to us in Christ Jesus. The story of Jesus is our story. The victory of Jesus is our victory. The power of Jesus is our power. There is no evidence that Jesus lived his faithful life without anxiety, worry, fear, or sadness. In fact if you listen to the Gospel story you can hear it. He wept at the

grave of Lazarus. He experienced temptation. He knew betrayal by his dearest most trusted friend. He was misunderstood by his family. He was hated, distrusted, used, and not even thanked by some he cured. At the end, he knew a loneliness none of us should ever experience. But the story does not end there does it, because God was for him.

We are a people that Paul describes as "In" Christ. We are not about Christ or for Christ. We are in Christ. To be in Christ puts us within the sphere of divine love. The result is that nothing can cut us off from the love of Christ. There is no denying that there is evil, that there is sin, that there is sadness and tragedy everywhere, but there is also no denying that these things are not catastrophic. In this there is always then reason for hope, reason to rejoice, reason to be grateful and for that we are here in this holy place to sustain that hope, to remind ourselves of what God has done for us, and to place ourselves again in this Holy Communion of a Church deeply and finally and forever in Christ Jesus.

If God is for us.....who can be against us?

Audio Available

386

Ordinary Time 19

8/10/2008

1 Kgs 19:9-13 + Ps 85:9-14 + Rom 9:1-5 + Mt 14:22-33

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

387

Solemnity of the Assumption

8/15/2008

Revelation 11: 19, 12: 6-10 +1 Corinthians 15: 20-27 + Luke 1: 39-56

Fr. Boyer

The messenger says that she is favored by God. Yet anyone who would examine her life might at first wonder what being favored by God means. There is certainly no reason to think that it brings the promise of an easy life. This woman so highly favored by God watched her Son be misunderstood by the crowds, denied and betrayed by his friends, and killed by the powerful political and religious authorities of her time. She might have thought God's favor would spare her but instead it made her more vulnerable to a broken heart and brought immense responsibility. She stood at the foot of the cross, and she watched her Son breathe his last, accepting his painful death. She held his dead body in her arms and let go of the one she loved most.

But this Feast of Hope reminds us that this is not the end of her story. Easter came and Pentecost. Jesus, who had promised that he was the resurrection and the life, fulfilled that promise before her very eyes. His promise to send the Spirit was fulfilled, and she was in that room says the one who records the event. In this truth lies the meaning of God's "favor". Being favored by God and faithful to God never means being free of trouble and pain. It means something more important and more wonderful. It means that when that favor is returned, promises are fulfilled and hope is sustained through the darkest of times.

That Pentecost was not the first time the Spirit had come upon Mary. The first time in Nazareth she became the mother of Christ. The second time in Jerusalem she became the mother of us all, Mother of the Church.

She continues to proclaim the greatness of God and lift up the lowly, the hungry, and those overlooked in every age. In so far as we her children learn from our mother and make her cry of victory our own, we too shall know the favor of God.

Anyone of us who has stood at the side of a loved one dying or in death has every reason to cling to the hope this Feast proclaims.

It is the hope that there is life after death for both those who continue on this earth and for those who pass into God's embrace. It is the hope that every trial and every suffering opens us ever more widely to the possibility and the promise that all will be well in God's time, and that those who ponder these things in their hearts meaningfully seek God's plan and God's will shall experience the gratitude of the Father and the embrace of His Only Son when finally coming home.

Audio Available

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7 + Psalm 67 + Romans 11:13-15, 29-32 + Matthew 15: 21-28

Fr. Boyer

For three more weeks, until September 14 when will assemble here to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross we shall listen to Paul as he writes to the faithful in Rome. For some time, the Jewish Christians were the sole presence of the Gospel in Rome, and they had paid for it dearly by their expulsion from synagogue and alienation from other Jews who would have nothing to do with the Gospel and its Christian traditions. They certainly must have taken great comfort then from each other. We could suspect that they were very close, and their identity came from what they suffered and what they believed to be true.

Then in no time at all Gentile convert/believers are all around them, and then before they knew what was happening, the Gentile Christians outnumbered the Jewish Christians which gave rise to questions and conflicts that Paul addresses with pastoral passion and a spirit filled wisdom. Who was more Christian? Who was more faithful? Who is more worthy: the faithful Jewish Christians, the Gentile outsiders? What about the other Jews long thought to be God's Chosen?

How could these foreigners fit in? They were not chosen by God. How are they going to pray: in Hebrew, in Latin, in Greek, Aramaic? What about the customs that for all the groups had for so long been the source of their pride, their reason for celebration, their identity?

It all sounds like our church still troubled with the same experiences in this country, and the wisdom and counsel of Paul is as true today as it was while he was writing. We are very much like those Jewish Christians suddenly surrounded by others. We are used to doing things our way, and some have no doubt considered themselves "chosen people." Some among us have paid a big price for their faith, and all of us have customs and little things that express our identity. We like to pray in our language even though some imagine that it was better in Latin. Instead of Gentile Christians, now it's Hispanic Christians who by some counting will soon out number us; and things will be different. We will be different and they will be different. To this experience Paul speaks in a powerful way, and so does the Jesus of today's Gospel.

Racism, anti-Semitism, any kind of phobia about others as well is what Paul challenges in this chapter of his letter. We cannot allow these things to spoil our lives together before our God. All kinds of stuff goes on in Christian communities. The fact of the matter is, we don't always like each other, we hold grudges and sometimes think of getting even. Add to this the fact that this is an "eye for an eye" culture, and the mission of our church and the work of our faith is serious and difficult. We are called to build relationships as a church in which we confess that there is something more important than me. We are called to remember and to witness to the world that our Lord is present; and has an agenda beyond our differences that can build a context big enough for our differences even when they are ongoing and unresolved.

What Paul explains to the Romans and to us, is that God has chosen us all. In the context of Paul's Rome, that included unfaithful Jews, and unchosen Gentiles. Everyone was in need of salvation, the Gentiles who did not know election, and the Jews who even though they were chosen were not examples of faithfulness. It's the same for us. The only people in need of salvation are those who have been unfaithful or "disobedient" as Paul calls it. "Let anyone without sin cast the first stone." is how John put it.

The discussion here is not about whether Christians have to be Jews or Jews are to become Christians. It is about how God saves and calls a commonly disobedient humanity that exists in a broken relationship with God.

To get the point even more clearly, enter a Canaanite woman in Matthew's Gospel.

The Canaanite's were famous for their idolatry and human sacrifices, and Israel wanted nothing to do with them. To make matters worse, this is a woman, a Canaanite woman! Jesus is embarrassed and you can almost feel it in the text. He is even silent in the face of this mess. But, see what happens. Disciples push for her exclusion, but her faith gains her a place of honor regardless of anything else. Her faith triumphs over national boundaries. Pay attention to what the Prophet said in Isaiah about how foreigners are joined to the Lord and come his holy mountain.

What we see and what we learn is that the mission of Christ is for all people and even all creatures --- all creation. Everything is made new in Christ. The theologians have a term: apokatastasis it means making things new, a transformation of all beings, the reordering of fallen creation in Christ.

In an age that has seen gas chambers, firing squads, anonymous mass graves, ethnic cleansing exploitation of poor countries by wealthy, industrialized nations the work of Christ will take divine presence, and we have it in the church, in you and me. Jesus came to make possible what seems impossible.

In a way, the Canaanite woman is a guide here, and an unlikely one at that. Yet, herein lies the truth: those whom we target as outsiders are often the ones who lead us to the doors of the kingdom of God.

Now the Eucharist is before us. Here at this table we become one here on this holy mountain. We must stop looking at how different we are and discover how much our faith and our hope for the Kingdom has made us one.

Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 21

8/24/2008

Is 22:19-23 + Ps 138:1-8 + Rom 11:33-36 + Mt 16:13-20

Fr. Boyer

Through the verses of Romans chapter 9 to 11, Paul has conducted himself like an attorney. He set forth his position clearly and convincingly. Then he gives a powerful closing argument. We just heard it in these three verses that conclude chapter 11.

He did everything he could to convince his fellow Jews to accept Jesus as the Savior they had long waited for. He argued that God's plan had started with them, and that through them salvation was extended to all the peoples of the earth. No results. So what does Paul do? He sits back to wait for God to do what Paul cannot do. He surrenders his will and his desire for his fellow Jews to God's wisdom.

Hidden in this wonderful poetic acclamation is a truth we often fail to grasp; the truth that sometimes God uses negatives to accomplish the divine purpose - "inscrutable ways" Paul calls it. What Paul as awakened to in his struggle is that God can take bad things and use them for good, and that realization moves him to the poetic acclamation we had just heard. Paul has reasoned that Israel rejected Christ because of grace. What kind of thinking is this we might wonder. In having Israel refuse Christ (a negative), God opens salvation to others (a positive)so that they might lead Israel to salvation. What Paul suggests is that only God could pull that off. Only God could think of such a plan.

This is the mystery Paul acknowledges: that God can draw good from evil; that God can take what seems to be bad and turn it into grace. This is inscrutable wisdom. This is deep knowledge. This is unsearchable. God can bring good from anything. The best example of this is the sacrifice of God's own Son on a cross. The ultimate wrong becomes the ultimate good. The rebellious human heart hardened to the point of murdering an innocent and good man brings goodness and kindness by the depths of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God.

Rather than argue any further, Paul is content to celebrate what is incomprehensible. God is so unlike humans in every way that we are able to count on God being constant as we are inconstant and as faithful as we are unfaithful. At this point for Paul, theology turns to poetry. The seeking mind gives way to the adoring heart. Every one of us faces more often than we care to count situations and events that we cannot understand and cannot control: people we cannot sway with kindness or clarity; tragedies we cannot understand, avoid, nor change. What Paul teaches us today is that there are times when the human mind can only go so far, and when that limit is reached, there is nothing left but to accept and to adore.

Paul had battled with what for him was a heart-breaking problem with every resource he had. He never thinks he solved the problem, he simply knows that he did his best and is content to leave the problem unsolved to the love and power of God. It seems like a good lesson for us all. There is a time when only silence, praise, adoration, and faith will suffice. When believers learn this, they will attain great wisdom.
Audio Available

Jeremiah 20: 7-9 + Psalm 63 + Romans 12: 1-2 + Matthew 16: 21-27

Fr. Boyer

In the film "As good as it gets" Jack Nicholson had a memorable line that compliments Paul's council today. A bitter cynic, Nicholson's character is mellowed by Helen Hunt's character whose kindness and caring finally made him declare: "You make me want to be a better man."

This is the response Paul proposes to those who have a sense of the goodness and mercy of God. This becomes the heart Pauline morality. The law is no longer the standard of perfection or the way to holiness. We all know how it is possible to be rule keepers and yet be cruel and selfish, self-justified sorry representatives of God's mercy and love. Failure comes from what is not done while keeping the law. This is the risk of becoming nothing more than law-keepers. Paul suggests that there is in those who follow Christ something more than the law motivating a moral life. It is an awareness of the goodness and mercy of God and desire to live in worthy humble response to that God. "You make me want to be a better man."

Life in Christ which Paul has spent 11 chapters describing brings about a change that transforms one's life into a living liturgy - into a continual day and day out sacrifice that gives praise to God by everything that is said and everything that is done. Paul's suggestion for offering one's body is fulfilled by living in the presence of God all day long so that whatever one is doing becomes an act of worship, an act of praise, an act of thanksgiving to God. This what he means by "offering one's body." It is the essence of "liturgy" which literally means "work done for pay." It describes a worker who gives service in exchange for pay. In this case, the "pay" is the glory of God. Eventually the word came to that to which a person gives their lives: in other words someone who is dedicated.

Paul's plea is that we who know what God has done for us would respond with dedication - would give our lives, what we do as an offering of thanks and praise. "You make me want to be a better man."

This is the heart of morality in Paul's teaching: a truly moral person is not someone who keeps the law, but someone who seeks to discover the will of God. They no longer turn to the rules to determine what is right and what is good, what is just or what is best. They discern what it is that God wills and wishes for creation and for those who live in God's presence. We can go wrong by following the rules, but we can't go wrong by discerning the will of God. The law is not enough in Paul's teaching. It is not that the law is wrong, it is simply not enough and without a Spirit filled life that seeks to live in God's presence and seeks to fulfill God's will by the decisions of one's life one cannot be good and pleasing and perfect to quote the last verse of today's readings.

This is what today's Gospel calls for - making one's life an offering to God, doing what is asked of us in this life for the sake of God's glory. This is the conduct of service that the returning Son of Man will recognize and repay. It is the kind of life lived by the Son of Man himself and by all would belong to the Son of Man. This what an unenlightened Peter could not figure out. This is what Peter before Pentecost did not understand: that in obedience to the Father's Will Jesus reached perfection - the Will of the Father was the embracing of the cross. To not take it up and seek the Father's will in doing so would have meant being conformed to this age: an age that does not care about what God wills, an age that is concerned with career and power, possessions and prestige rather than service, love, and sacrifice for

the glory of God,

This is the transformation Paul calls for: a transformation, not a conformation. Being conformed to this age leads one to avoid what is difficult and troublesome, service and sacrifice. But being transformed leads one into Christ, into Christ's way, Christ's obedience and desire to know and follow the will of the Father. It is the only way to holiness: asking what God desires. It is the only norm for morality: doing what is the Father's will. It is the only way to distinguish those who belong to this age, and those who belong to the age to come.

Wanting to become a better person, like Jack Nicholson's character leads one to desire and seek first with Will of God. Doing so is what it means to gain one's life.

Audio Available

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Ordinary Time 23

9/7/2008

Ezekiel 33:7-9 + Psalm 95 + Romans 13:8-10 + Matthew 18:15-20

Fr. Boyer

In verses just before these, Paul has given his Roman community instructions about how they are to relate to civil society. He speaks of their "obligations" and how believers are to fulfill those obligations within their society. They are to pay all their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, too to whom a toll is due, respect where respect is due; honor where honor is due. These are things that the believer owes to the greater community, and in that frame of thinking, the verse begins today addressing one last great debt. It is a debt that can never be repaid, the deepest and biggest debt of all: love. Having fulfilled all other obligations, there is one left that defines and completes what is expected and asked of those who would be counted as members of a community of faith in Jesus Christ.

As we discovered last week, the heart of morality in Paul's teaching is the recognition of what God has done for us and the stirring desire to seek God's will. As I put it last week, "You make me want to be better." is the way we respond when we live in awareness of what God has done. In Paul's development of this kind of morality, today's instruction begins to address the question: "Why?" Why is God so merciful, generous, and kind? What is it about God that brings out these divine actions? How is it that everyone merits this mercy, generosity, and kindness? Paul knows, and we do too. It is Love. It is love for us. It is love for us all; and as soon as we recognize that, we begin to understand what it takes to live a moral and good life. We know what it is that colors, shapes, and motivates our search for what God desires for us; love.

Paul speaks of this love as an obligation, not an option. It is a duty, a debt we owe to God - not simply to love God; but love as God loves. Divine love is self sacrificing not self serving. Divine love is not a feeling or emotion. It is a way of life that we have seen in Jesus Christ. It is way of life that reaches out to others that includes and embraces everyone. It is a way of life that seeks the will of the Father; that finds time for prayer and fellowship. It is a life marked by forgiveness, simplicity and truth. It is a life of justice and passion for the outcast, the hungry, the grieving, the refugee. This is the Will of God for us that we love as God loves. It is no anemic or emotional experience. It locks us into active concern for the good of others and permits no hint of retaliation or vengeance in the human heart. All of that evil is put out by the transformation we seek in the Spirit.

This love is a simple idea; but a huge obligation on our part. If God loves us in spite of our unfaithfulness, in spite of what we have done and how we have dismissed his Son, we owe God something. We owe God the obligation of that same love for one another. It is a debt created by the infinite love we have received from God in Christ. Deserving and undeserving alike know the love of God, and so it must be for us who stand in this grace. We do not love and care for only those who deserve our respect, our sacrifice, and our service.

Parents, you know and understand this. It is the way you love your children even when they do not seem to deserve it, or take you for granted. Children see your parents and how they care for you even when you misbehave, are rude, and selfish. This is the love Paul speaks of today. It is the love that keeps us together, the love that reconciles, and heals. It is the love that does no evil. It is a love that is found where ever two or three have gathered. It is the love that we find then in this place, a house of love, a house of God.

Audio Available

392

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

9/14/2008

Nm 21:4-9 + Ps 78:1-38 + Phil 2:6-11 + Jn 3:13-17

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

Isaiah 55: 6-9 + Psalm 145 + Philippians 1:20-24,27 + Matthew 20:1-16

Fr. Boyer

It is a dark day in the life of Paul. He is in prison. He will be tried, and there is every possibility that he will face execution. From that prison under these circumstances, he writes to his most beloved community of friends at Philippi, and we are privileged to hear what he writes on a few Sundays this month, and are led into a profound reflection on the meaning of and the hope we have by our relationship with Christ Jesus.

The Philippians have sent him a gift of money to ease his suffering in confinement. He writes to thank them, and then turns the tables, so to speak by comforting the ones who wanted to do the comforting. Their fear for him is challenged by his joy, and their anxiety is challenged by his faith. The message here is addressed to anyone who has any fear or anxiety about death. Paul sees the possibility of his death as a portal to a deeper union with Christ. He understood dying as the beginning of a new way of living.

It is not as though Paul hates this life and longs for the next. On the contrary, what we feel in his writing is a tension between the two which have noble and worthy ends. He could remain and carry on his mission and work in which he finds meaning and happiness, or he could be with the Christ for whom he longs. This tension becomes a marker by which we all might well measure the development of our faith. It might be something to examine in our selves without the pressure of a serious medical problem or advancing age. In fact, those challenges to this life might be easier if we have already come to the point to which Paul has come.

By his own admission, Paul was not sure whether he preferred to go on living or to die and be with Christ. Living meant more work, more preaching and more confrontations with those who opposed his efforts and rejected his message. Dying was a plus all the way around; "for me," Paul said, "death is gain." What he shows us is how to arrive at that point of faith, and then be content to do as God sees fit.

All of us who follow Christ as did Paul have our feet in both worlds; the already and the not yet. We have already a sense of God's presence and love, but have not yet realized and seized it entirely. There is so much to keep us focused on this life: our families, our children, our careers, our hopes and expectations!

Getting rid of the dread of death and jumping with both feet into a faith-filled loving relationship with God means that first of all we have to embrace what the prophet Isaiah said to us today: God's ways are not our ways. God sees how things will end up, and as God said at creation, "It is good." And then we must immerse our selves into God's merciful love. That is the generous mercy we have just heard of in the Gospel. Without that kind of mercy and generous love, we have no hope of survival. Whether we believe it or not, we are the ones who have come late and last. Our best hope is that a generous God will receive us with the same welcome as those who have done more and done better and served longer.

I think sometimes we are more afraid of faith than we are of death. We are afraid of what faith may ask of us or where it may lead us. It seems safer to keep God at a distance. Faith will challenge our life styles, it may cost us a relationship, some pleasure, and may make us seem more religious. But without it, we will never know the depth of the fullness of life and love in Christ unless we take the plunge with both feet. Living this life to the fullest like Paul is what makes it possible to face the next life with Joy

rather than fear.

Audio Available

394

Ordinary Time 26

9/28/2008

Ez 18:25-28 + Ps 125:4-9 + Phl 2:1-11 + Mt 21:28-32

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

Isaiah 5: 1-7 + Psalm 80 + Philippians 4: 6-9 + Matthew 21:33-43

Fr. Boyer

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell this parable.

Only Matthew concludes with the proposal that the Kingdom might be taken away and given to a people who will produce fruit. It is a twist on the parable that ought to hit us all between the eyes. We have grown up in this culture with the assumption that the Kingdom of God, Heaven like everything else is always available to us if we just work hard enough and long enough. "On demand" television is just the latest toy that continues to suggest to us the false truth that we can have anything we want whenever we want it. The consequence of this thinking is our sense of entitlement. It is rampant in our nation and our generations, and even in our church. So we tramp through the Earth's resources, claiming its juiciest fruits for ourselves. We take the largest portion of everything there is, and if we're not number one we sink into depression and set out to change it at all cost. It's always struck me that there is nothing wrong with being number one unless you can't stand being number two. At that point you have and you are a problem.

In Native American culture, people come into their own and into respect not by what they own or amass in wealth, but by what they give. Keeping wealth moving is the way gifts remain sacred. A free-market society reverses the picture: getting rather than giving is the mark of a substantial person; at that point Entitlement reigns.

Entitlement is the problem in this parable,

and there is a stern warning in the Matthew version that Entitlement leads to disaster.

The chief priests and elders are asked to judge what the owner should do, and you know what they say. Their problem is they think like owners. Not for a minute do they think like tenants, and with that they go wrong.

Saint Paul was learning to live as a tenant in the vineyard, and his relationship and his letter to the Philippians comes out of that life style. When he suggests to them that they should "keep in doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me" he is not saying: "Look at me." Look how good I am." He is proposing that they must become what he has become: an example.

They must set example of what it means to be a steward in the vineyard of the Lord. This is the heavy burden, the weighty responsibility we have as followers of Christ. We are to provide an example for others. Parents, it is what you must become for your children:

examples of what is true, what is honorable,

what is just, what is pure, what is lovely, what is gracious, and what is excellent.

What you learned and received is what you must pass on. This is what produces good fruit.

You may not be more concerned about your child's career than you are about their soul.

You may not be more concerned about their ability to play sports than you are about their ability to pray.

You may not be more concerned about their friends than you are about their friendship with Christ.

You may not be more concerned about their attendance at school than their attendance at this feast. Example is what we must provide.

We must give example to each other by the charity of our talk and our judgments.

We must give example to each other by how we give not by what we keep.

Paul singles out for the Philippians and for us the qualities that are the fruits of this vineyard. They are not the stuff we buy or want. They are not found at the Mall or on line. They are not what we wear, what we drive, or how we look. They are not prestige, power, influence, or success measured by wealth. They are gentleness, peace, concern for justice and an absence of worry.

A people who wish for the peace of God can only find it and live in it when they have embraced the life of stewardship and see themselves as tenants in this vineyard: tenants from whom the master expects some fruits. We have no reason to expect anything except the master's return and a time to give an account of our stewardship here. The fruit will come from the example we have given, and the example we have led.

Audio Available

396

Ordinary Time 28

10/12/2008

Is 25:6-10 + Ps 23:1-6 + Phil 4:12-20 + Mt 22:1-14

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

397

Ordinary Time 29

10/19/2008

Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6 + Psalm 96 + 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5 + Matthew 22:15-21

Fr. Boyer

There is a profound distinction to be made when pondering Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, and it is one that easily escapes us in our choice laden world; in a society that prizes "choice" above justice and too often above life itself.

Throughout this letter, Paul reminds his readers that they have been chosen by God, but somehow that never seems to sink in.

We like the privilege of choosing, but no matter how hard we try convincing ourselves, our presence here, our very existence is not intentional. We did not choose to be born, we do not choose life, God does, and thinking otherwise is the root of great evil.

I did not choose to wake up this morning. Nothing I did brought the dawn, and there is nothing I can do to bring another. Paul wants us to understand that the first choice is God's, and other choices come from God's first choice.

We might like to think that we made a choice to be Catholic, that we decided to get here for Mass today; but that's not the way it is.

Our faith is no more intentional than our birth or our life. It is a gift from a God who has chosen us: chosen to feed us, to speak with us through His Word, chosen to be present to us in a sacramental life, listen to us, and be tolerantly patient with us while we pretend that it's our choice. The more I am around people who come to us in the RCIA program, the more I realize who is doing the choosing. God is choosing those people for faith and this sacramental life. If God chose them, God chose me as well.

I think back sometimes to the feelings I had when as a child we would be choosing up sides for games, and how it felt to finally be chosen for one team or another and then how hard I would play to make sure they believed they had made the right choice and would choose me tomorrow. I remember what it was like when I pretended that I was choosing to be a priest only to wake up suddenly one day and realize that if the faculty and the bishop did not choose me for ordination all those years of study had taken me no where - except maybe to bring me to that realization and profound understanding that it was not I who chose the Lord, but the Lord who chose me.

You think about your lives and remember what it was like when you asked someone to be your husband or your wife. You may have thought you did the choosing, but in the end you had to wait to be chosen, and when you were, you were different. It's the same with jobs isn't it? You wait to be chosen for promotions or some new position, and when you get chosen, you work and perform to prove and be worthy of the choice another made in order to keep that position.

It is not much different for us when it comes to faith. We all meet people day in and day out who do not have faith or who do not share our faith. I see them often and wonder how they face and live with the trials and tragedies of life, and sometimes they do not, and then make bad choices which makes things worse.

The fact is, Paul reminds us, we have been chosen. We are by faith and by Baptism a chosen people.

When we stop thinking that we've made the choice, we shall begin to act and live with humility and gratitude befitting a chosen and holy people. When we stop thinking that we have made the choices we shall have embraced the very heart of Christian morality, and holiness will be ours because God has chosen to make it so.

God has called us to this place. We must be here because we have heard the call and are overwhelmed by the wonder and mystery of it. We would do well to ask "why me?" but not at times of pain or disappointment, but rather at times of goodness and joy. It is the right way to stand before God, not with the pride of pretending we have chosen God; but with the humility of knowing that God has chosen us, called us, asked so little of us. Getting that right changes everything about being here, about being faithful, prayerful, present at Eucharist, just, and merciful. Paul thinks it's time for us to get over ourselves - and get into the mystery of having been chosen and what it will mean for us and how we shall live together because of it.

Audio Available

Exodus 20: 20-26 + Psalm 18 + 1 Thessalonians 1: 5-10 + Matthew 22: 34-40

Fr. Boyer

Two words leap from the Epistle of Paul today to describe what is characteristic of the Christian life: serve and await.

These are things that run contrary to twenty-first century life.

We are accustomed to being served, and we don't wait well.

Suddenly Paul's letter might just as well address the church of Norman as well as the church of Thessalonica.

I believe that keeping these two characteristics together is important if we are to get into the thinking of Saint Paul.

We must remember that this wise and passionate apostle was first of all a pastor who was writing and addressing real experiences and issues in the lives of his friends.

So, I don't think he is proposing service as a novel idea to those he addresses. He has already praised their goodness. Through out the letter he acknowledges the good things they have been doing. It is because of those things that he must encourage them since they are so good and so faithful, that they have been drawing attention to themselves. He acknowledges that they have turned from idols and that they have become imitators of himself and the Lord so much so that they are becoming models of faithful life as stewards of God's gifts.

The problem arises with the second characteristic: waiting. They don't like it. They tire of it. They want results, and they want them now. They want their reward, and when it does not come on their time, Paul knows it's time to write a letter to remind them that you can't just serve expecting gratitude, rewards, or results, you also have to wait.

Loyal service and patient waiting are the marks of faithful disciples.

Without the second part of this experience, the first part is often undone. Too often we give up or quit when there is no recognition of our service. Too often when we do the right thing and nothing gets better, we try something else rather than wait. What Paul would have us understand is that glory must be awaited with confidence, and it is slow in coming. You see, those Thessalonians expected Christ to come and acknowledge the risks they were taking by their willingness to abandon the idols and serve others rather than themselves. They wanted it now. They expected Christ to come and reward their loyalty and their service with glory and honor, and they thought was going to happen soon. The risk that Paul sees is that they might give up on service and sacrifice when rewards, gratitude, glory and honor were not forthcoming. Instead of being honored by fellow Thessalonians, these followers of Christ were ridiculed, abused, imprisoned, and scorned. It would be enough to make anyone return to the old ways of "taking care of number one", the old ways of only doing things that provided instant gratification, or of only doing things people would admire and praise.

It cannot be so suggests Paul. We keep on serving, keep on loving, keep on giving even when things do not happen fast or exactly as we expected because we keep on waiting.

Parents, you know how that works. You continue to love, serve, give, protect and provide for your

children even when they never say thank you and continually ask, "Is that all?" You wait. You wait until they grow up, and if you make it long enough, you watch them as parents, and you smile. Waiting is the mark of fidelity, the mark of a true follower of Christ. It means you don't quit. Your children may leave you, reject your faith, question your values and judgments; but you keep on waiting. They may run away, but you wait like the father of the two sons who waits and watches.

Young people, hear what Paul teaches us. If you do things for glory and recognition now, you'll have none later. If you keep your eyes fixed on later, on another time, another age, or another life, you get closer to what Paul suggests is the way real followers of Christ live. He never gave up on those twelve. He waited for the Holy Spirit to come and finish in their hearts what he began, and in a sense he wasn't there to see it; but he was willing to wait for God's promise to be fulfilled.

Serve and wait. It's what we do. It's how we live. It's how we are faithful. This world doesn't get it, but Paul would have us believe it.

Audio Available

399

All Souls

11/2/2008

Wis 3:1-9 + Ps 23:1-6 + Rom 5:5-11 + Jn 6:37-40

Fr. MacAulay

Audio Available

400

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

11/9/2008

Ezekiel 47:1-2,8-9,12 + Psalm 46 + 1 Corinthians 3:9-11,16-17 + John 2:13-22

Fr. Boyer

In John's Gospel, the first of seven signs has just been revealed at Cana's wedding feast, and the verses we proclaim today come as a simple reflection on the sign we have just been given. As the water is replaced by wine, now we see the Temple and its worship being replaced by Jesus. He is the center. He replaces the water with himself and the temple with his presence. It is an important thing to see as the western church celebrates this Feast today with the memory of our most ancient church's dedication in Rome.

Yet this is never about Constantine's gift Basilica on the Lateran Hill. It is not about the Cathedral of Rome no matter how lovely it is today and how significant it is with its history and its great baptistry. That building standing today has been in ruins more than once. The fact that the Pope now lives across the river on the Vatican hill rather than at this historical place of beginnings is a reminder that it was once uninhabitable. This feast is about Christ Jesus and His enduring presence among us, and the first name of this building that gives reason for this celebration every November 9 was first named: Church of the Savior.

Every civilization has certain places that it sets apart as holy. Mountains, Trees, Stones, and Water were especially respected and often times became a meeting place with the gods. They were the starting point or the goal of pilgrims, and as such they became places of worship. Mountains in particular were the favorite locale for cultic rites. Psychologically they were closer to the sky and a ladder to the divine. Often stones were piled high on mountains to reach even higher than the terrain would allow. In time these would evolve into tombs, temples, and shrines. These were often oriented to face the rising sun.

For more than a thousand years, the most sacred place of Judaism was the Temple on the mount that is Jerusalem. But its destruction by hostile invaders brought about a more spiritual worship, a religion of the heart which some prophets encouraged with a caution against excessive attachment to a temple of stone suggesting that poor and contrite hearts were a better dwelling place for God. For the first followers of Christ it became clear that Jesus was the new temple where one would encounter God, and once his death and resurrection were experienced through Pentecost, they began to see themselves, as Paul suggests, as the new temple built on the foundation or the corner stone of Christ.

It is a good reminder for us today in this beautiful church that this building is here because we are here, not the other way around. In fact, if there is someone here because of the building, this Feast comes as a challenge and a contradiction to that thinking. It is Christ the Savior that must draw us together, not bricks made by human hands. This place, like the Church of the Lateran is a gift, a gift we make to God. It can and it will come down someday, but the faith we celebrate, nurture, and share in this place does not. In this place we bear witness to the power of that faith to give life and hope, to give light and voice the faith we share. This is the goal of our pilgrimage through the past week. We come to this church like pilgrims, and like so many other sacred and holy places, it reaches high toward the sky, and as you enter, you face the east looking for risen and coming light.

This is a place of covenant; of feasting; of proclaiming. It is place of sacrifice; a meeting place where God is revealed in sacrament, song, and service. Water flows here at the entrance. Look at it. Touch it.

See the three sources that flow from the font and collect in the pool below. Be reminded of the Trinity and the power of those names. The prophet's promise is fulfilled in this place and among us.

Our churches are for us a mirror that reminds us who we are. The world says we are consumers flashing a constant stream of icons to remind us of this and make us want more. The church reminds us of our deepest identity, a people of diversity who become one in Christ Jesus and in whom dwells the Spirit of the Living God. It reminds us that we are not alone, but in here are surrounded by statues and icons to remind us as Paul says: that "we are fellow citizens with the saints". This day we celebrate what we have become in Christ: a prophetic people, a priestly people, a holy people.

Audio Available

401

Ordinary Time 33

11/16/2008

Prv 31:10-31 + Ps 128:1-5 + 1 Thes 5:1-6 + Mt 25:14-30

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

402

Christ the King

11/23/2008

Ez 34:11-17 + Ps 23:1-6 + 1 Cor 15:20-28 + Mt 25:31-46

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

403

Advent 1

11/30/2008

Isaiah 63: 16-17, 19 + Psalm 80 + 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 + Mark 13:33-37

Fr. Boyer

Years ago I was pastor at Saint Joseph Church in Union City, a place put on the map by a tornado that nearly destroyed the town just a couple of years before I came. Until the big one that tore through Cleveland County not long ago, it was the "big one" that every one talked about and studied. Because of it, darkening skies and wall clouds as we in Oklahoma know to call them always got the attention of the survivors in Union City. I remember clearly the experience of standing at the back door of the rectory which opened to the southwest any time there would be one of those great Oklahoma storms. I would stand there and watch. If I were asleep, I would get up at the sound of big thunder and go there to look out because it was only a few steps to the storm cellar. More than once I made the jump from the doorway to the cellar in rain and hail and wind.

The memory of that experience of standing in a door way and watching is my own, but I believe everyone in here has done the same thing. Standing in a door way watching and waiting is something we have all done whether we watch for a storm or for a loved one to come home, we know what it is to wait and to watch, and much of it is done from a doorway if not from a window.

We are somehow a people who seem to be found at a threshold, in a door way, or at the gate as the Gospel image suggests. We are almost by nature waiters and watchers, and some of us do it better than others. We have shifted today into the year of Mark's Gospel, closing for while the Gospel of Matthew. It is a Gospel that time and time again challenges the fear that haunts us as it tells the story of faith's growth. This is the Gospel of calming seas, of casting out unclean spirits that frighten bystanders and possessed. It is the Gospel that brings people beyond fear to awe and amazement. Who is this that wind and sea obey him? Who is this that speaks with authority? Who is this who has come among us? This kind of awe and amazement is the threshold of faith; doors that when open invite us to move from fear to awe to trust and belief.

Today's Gospel speaks of evening, of midnight, of cockcrow or dawn, and believers make a connection with the hours of the passion. It reminds us of sleeping disciples who fail to watch. He wakes them and they sleep again. At midnight comes Judas and a crowd, and all but Peter run away in fear. No door way to faith opens until cockcrow when Peter's faith is awakened and he weeps. Then comes the fourth time: the "dawn"; the hour when Mary Magdalene and her friends stand at the doorway of death and find it open.

Think today and through these season of the doorways in our lives, of the doorway in which we stand and the thresholds over which we must pass from fear and doubt to faith and trust. There are doorways everywhere through which we encounter one another and our God. Our houses have doors. Our offices have doors. The places where we shop for food and for gifts have doors. These are thresholds where we can be awake to one another.

Think this Advent season of these hours:
of evening when we are tired and want to give up
of dark midnight moments when our fears take us over
and we run from what is hard and difficult frightening and unknown.

of cockcrow that hour when we recognize that there are things in our lives we profoundly regret, things we never thought we were capable of doing.

Our tears and our sorrow make us real.

That time is a threshold to cross into forgiveness and peace.
of the dawn, the hour of resurrection the time of waking.

Across that threshold comes the faith that life can come where there is death, that dead relationships can awaken,
that dead leadership may rise up to the agony of people in need,
and that closed doors and closed hearts may break open with joy.

The Gospel we proclaim today ought to alert us
like gathering clouds in the western sky.

In these verses, Jesus gives three commands:

Be on the watch.

Stay awake.

Be on guard.

An open doorway is a good way to watch.

An open doorway is a good way to make sure that this time when Christ comes there will be a hospitable welcome where all will be prepared rather than finding the door closed because there is no room.

Audio Available

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 + Psalm 85 + 2 Peter 3: 8-14 + Mark 1:1-8

Fr. Boyer

Beginnings and endings are sometimes difficult to tell apart. Which one is which often depends on which way you are looking: backwards or forwards. Graduation is a perfect example. I've received several announcements this week from young people who are graduating. It may be the end of formal education or the beginning of a career. It seems as though we have fairly well caught that idea when we call the ceremony involved: "Commencement." While something is ending, something is also beginning. For us who believe, death is no more an ending than birth. A pregnancy may end, but it means something begins.

The opening of the Gospel of Mark is unique and significant. In the first verse, he announces a beginning; and to those rooted in the First Testament, there is a sudden parallel, a kind of connection that makes sense in terms of what follows. The first book of the Bible is called the Book of Beginnings, and the first word of Mark's Gospel is beginning. The connection between the two is no accident - this message of Mark is about creation beginning again, but there is no ending: no ending to the Hebrew Scriptures, and Mark's Gospel is notorious for having no ending. It simply seems to stop, or perhaps to "pause." All of which makes some sense in this season when endings and beginnings seem to blur a bit because with Creator God it's always going to be about beginnings.

There is a saying among those who work with groups and process that it "begins before it begins." Practically speaking, it means that if a group is getting together at 9:00, at 8:45 when they arrive, things are already happening. It's like that with Mass. It does not really begin when I invoke the Trinity in blessing. Today's Mass began when you focused on getting here, and what happened along the way has a great deal to do with how this liturgy is going to go for all of us. On another level, we bring our history to this assembly, and what we remember, and what we experienced in the past has everything to do with what happens today. It's true: "things begin before they begin." All this speaks to something important for this season and something deeply involved in the message of John: readiness.

Years after I left the seminary, I went back for a reunion or some meeting, I can't remember which; and I sat down at dinner with one of my professors. As we sat and talked, I was stunned at the man's wisdom, his humor, the breadth of his knowledge, and I found myself clinging to every word and idea. Later that evening, I was wondering: "When did he get so smart and so charming?" The more I wondered about it, I began to realize that he had not changed a bit. It was me. When I was twenty, I thought he was boring, aloof, and out of it; and here I was fifteen years later completely enchanted by the same man. I began to wish I could do some of that time I had spent there over again; but of course we rarely get that chance. The issue was simply a matter of readiness. I wasn't ready at age twenty.

The question of readiness is part of the reason why some of the people at the time of Jesus did not listen. It is because they were not exposed to Christ, not that they failed to see the miracles or hear his voice; it was simply a matter of not being ready. It is a matter of what we can and will let in, hear, and integrate. There are a lot of factors that make for readiness, but the chief among them is desire, and desire is what I ask you to reflect upon in this second week of advent.

Desire in Mark's Gospel is a big issue. He tells again and again of huge crowds frantic with a

desire to see Jesus, to hear Jesus, to meet Jesus. This image ought to give us reason to wonder about what it is we desire in this life. The people who flocked to hear John the Baptist heard him say something about beginnings, and they thought it was about endings, so in a desire to be ready for the end of time which they thought the Messiah would bring, they rushed to his baptism playing the odds that it would protect them from eternal destruction. Their desire to shed their sins was a last ditch effort to save themselves.

But instead of an end, what they got was a beginning; a chance for a future which they could enjoy if they had the desire and were ready. John's work and John's message are still with us because it begins before it begins. Before Jesus begins, John has already started, and if there is no end to Mark's Gospel, it is because the beginning has already begun and endings are always beginnings. Before Jesus begins, His Spirit is already at work, and the evidence of readiness is desire. Our readiness for the coming of Christ is measured by our desire. Our readiness for a life in Christ is measured by our openness the desire for conversion and repentance that shows itself in our willingness to change and be changed. The weariness and dullness of life lived for puny pleasures has little hope for a beginning. A past that is intolerable because of its desperate shallowness, loneliness, and emptiness drives people to the desert where a voice still cries out: "Be Ready"! Not for Christmas on December 25, but for a beginning that will satisfy our deepest desires and longings, and find us ready to begin again new and whole, and clean and pure, holy, and faithful. This kind of readiness needs an uncommon openness, a freedom, a willingness to be surprised to discover that just when we thought everything was over it was just beginning, just when we thought we might be finished, we had really just begun. That would be really good news.

Audio Available

405

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2008

Genesis 3: 9-15, 20 + Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12 + Luke 1: 26-38

Fr. Boyer

The Gospel for today tells us three things about Mary that she was "Full of Grace"; that she had "found favor with the Lord" and was the "handmaid of the Lord." The model of believers, a woman of faith, and the first one to bear the light of Christ into this world is described by Luke in terms of what we shall become if we are attentive to her example. When the church suggests that we think of Mary as a new Eve, we are invited to think of this woman in terms of what God originally had planned for us, a plan rejected by the first Eve and her companion in their pride and sin. In the divine plan to restore creation to its Original design, there comes a new Eve who is what each of us was intended to be: full of grace, favored by God, and a humble servant of this loving Creator/God.

The day after reflecting upon beginnings the recreation that Mark's Gospel announced yesterday, we have before us a model of what we should have been but yet can still become. While the doctrine of this feast speaks to Mary's Immaculate Conception, the truth of this feast speaks of what our Creator/God has intended and willed for us all from the beginning. In Christ creation begins again, and the new Eve graced, favored, and humble is this time without the sin of the first Eve.

All so that we too might be born into this creation full grace, favored by the Lord, and humble in his service. This is what we too become when the power of the Spirit comes upon us, when the power of the Spirit leads us to say, "Yes" rather than "No" to the will of God. This is what we become when we awaken to the power and grace of our Baptism and how the Lord has favored us with a faith that leads into the mystery of his presence leaving us humbled by a love that so heals and strengthens us that we can be nothing more than be God's humble servant.

Full of Grace is what God would have be.

We are a people who have found favor with God or we would never be in this place.

We are called to be God's servants - to fulfill God's will - and to humbly and faithfully bear the presence of God's Son into this world.

Mary stands before us today as the model of what we shall be, of what God has willed from the beginning, and as a reminder that in Christ, all creation is new for those who say "Yes" to the Will of the Father. Redeemed by the Blood of Christ and washed in the water of salvation, we are full of grace, and live in the favor of God. Coming to understand this can have only one consequence that we shall serve the Lord all the days of our lives.

Audio Available

406

Advent 3

12/14/2008

Is 61:1-11 + (Ps) Lk 1:46-54 + 1 Thes 5:16-24 + Jn 1:6-28

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

407

Advent 4

12/21/2008

2 Sm 7:1-16 + Ps 89:2-29 + Rom 16:25-27 + Lk 1:26- 38

Fr. Boyer

I am not sure if it is totally the fault of our "television world" or if there are other factors at play, but there are few facts to contradict a claim that we have become a spectator people. Too many of our children watch sports and so too many are over weight, and that continues into adulthood. It is not just about sports however. We have become a people who watch at the cost of action. Half of the people in this church watch what is going on and think that watching is what they came for. The hymnals stay in the pews, arms are folded, while they watch others at worship or withdraw into silent reflections as others lift their hearts and voices in the action of worship. We have watched the rich and powerful loot the retirement funds of people whose honest and hard work have made them rich and powerful. We have watched women and children become homeless while we rummage around for weapons of mass destruction, and we shake our heads helplessly in the face of genocide in foreign places whose names we cannot pronounce. The enormous complexity of a shrinking world that is always in our face not only leaves us sitting still, but often sitting on our hands fearful and confused about what to do, so we just watch.

The consequence of this has a spiritual dimension which today's Gospel subtly and quietly addresses. The spectator will know the story, but not know what to do with it. The spectator will likely turn the story into a Christmas pageant, a movie, or a wonderful painting to look at. It makes for an easy life, uncluttered by questions, demands, and expectations. The Gospel is not entertainment. It is not news like "Five Live" or "20-20" that we watch from an easy chair before supper. The Gospel is a call to action, a plan for life in the Kingdom of God.

Spectators will hear this Gospel and wonder what angels look like, how a woman might conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is all very fine to build from this story a huge tradition and spirituality surrounding the Blessed Mother. But to stop there in wonder and admiration is to be like the disciples who stood on a hill and heard a voice say, "Why are you standing here looking up into the sky?" There is no point other than entertainment and pious admiration in standing in awe before the details of this story. At some point, at some time, every one of us must ask the question, "What does this mean?" "How am I different because of it?"

This is not just a story about the beginning of our salvation. It is our story. A virgin in Nazareth is not the only person who has been visited by an angel. A woman betrothed to a man named, Joseph is not the only person graced and favored by God. A woman named Mary is not the only person who has been afraid and faced with difficult, life-plan changing decisions. What is ultimately revealed to us in this Gospel is the mystery of how the Word takes Flesh every day. What is revealed here is the path of Spiritual conception: hearing a transcendent Word, struggling to understand it, and finally uniting our will to that Word. That Word awakens us to our identity - it speaks of who we are as God's beloved and chosen. We began this liturgy with the words of the angel speaking to us and about us: The Lord is with you.

An eastern Bishop reflects upon our awakening to this wonder and suggests that we all have a "virgin point" within us. The secret center of our hearts, a deep sub conscious point that is walled up and unformed until God visits. It is the place where God meets each of us, a place to which only God has

access, and when God enters that place, we are totally God's own and alive only with the Spirit of God. We are not accustomed to thinking of ourselves this way, and we need to ponder a greeting that names us in this way. When willing to do so, a profound transformation takes place, a profound personal truth is realized. We are no longer physical and social beings struggling to promote and protect ourselves and provide for our children. We will know what it means to be sons and daughters of God. We will then be struggling to change physical and social reality to reflect our common innate dignity. Our little plans and self-centered ambitions will have to be integrated into a more comprehensive vision. It does not happen fast, and it does not happen without questions and more pondering. It does not happen without some fear. Playing it safe is a strong habit to break. Risking all is dangerous territory.

This is what this story is about my friends: you and me with a God who seeks access to that hidden place within us still to be formed into an image of God. This is what the annunciation is ultimately about: an annunciation that speaks of our identity and what God wishes us to become. What unfolds in this story is the suggestion that finally, after pondering we come to understand, and then with a courage that can come only from the Spirit, we consent to the Will of God and say "Yes" to a Spirit that will bring to life what is hidden deep within us from the beginning.

There are annunciations of one sort or another in each of our lives. Some of these result in great destinies undertaken unwillingly. Some of them result in a refusal or denial or perhaps in a teeth gritting reluctance. Some of them lead us embrace the radical agenda of a Gospel that insists that the meek will inherit everything and the powerful will come tumbling down. Either way, once we consent, we are no longer spectators.

There is a difficult truth here. Many would point to the privilege of Mary and in doing so, take themselves off the hook. Angelic visits are for special people after all, they think. I think otherwise because of Luke. Every life is visited by revelations and calls to commitment. We either agree reluctantly becoming joyless people cursed by our own call, or we turn away in weakness and say, "Not me." Some would think that when this happens, God closes the gates and rescinds the offer. I think Luke tells us this story because God sends another angel and still waits for our understanding and our consent.

Audio Available

408

Christmas

12/25/2008

Isaiah 9:1-6 + Hebrews 1: 1-6 + Luke 2: 1-14

Fr. Boyer

I can remember it as clearly as if it were this morning: April 19, 1995. More than anything else on that terrible day, more than the site of debris blowing on the downtown streets, more than the image of that ragged, torn, and twisted building, more than the faces of confused and frantic workers, I remember the silence. I remember running into Presbyterian Hospital and the strange silence that had settled into those hallways. A voice from somewhere was saying: "Code Black, Code Black, Code Black." I remember the odd silence as I stood where a policeman had taken me to the corner of 5th and Harvey; and the next day, I remember again the silence as I stood inside that mess on a lower level. The only sound was a strange groaning as the building shifted and settled a bit on unsteady beams. I could see buckets of hand moved debris moving around as men literally dug through walls of broken concrete; but all I remember is the silence in that place.

I remember another silence that settled into a hospital emergency room when beeping monitors were switched off because the life signs they recorded from my parents were no longer there. It was silent in those rooms, and it was a silence I did not want to break.

And there was another time not so long ago when I was standing outside a hospital room with my sister listening through a partially opened door to sounds from inside. We could hear a doctor giving instructions as my niece gave birth to her first child. "Push once more." a voice said, and then there was silence. It seemed to last an hour. Long enough for my sister and I to look at each other in surprise wonder, and alarm, but then the silence was broken by a baby's cry followed by the most wonderful Joy. I want you to think of times in your lives when silence has been memorable because we're not too comfortable in silence.

I live alone in a big house, and I've gotten quite accustomed silence, but every now and then I realize that without thinking I have turned on something: the TV, the stereo, the radio, or I find myself humming. Late last night I was in the elevator at Norman Regional Hospital, and there were several people in with me, but no one said a word. When one of the passengers broke the silence, the others looked for just a brief moment with caution at each other, and then the silence resumed. I thought later that the person who spoke out did so because the silence was simply too much for them. Either that, or the sound of piped in "Joy to the World" was just wrong in a place of such lonely suffering.

Silence is hard for us, at least for very long. Car radios are on all the time. If yours isn't chances are on any given day someone will pull up beside you with a thumb/thumb, thumb/thumb pulsating loudly enough to hear on the moon. People walk through the streets and ride airplanes with their ears stuffed with tiny speakers. Cell phones beep, jingle and screech rock music adding to the noise of our lives. Only the most rural of settings is free of the whine and whoosh of traffic sounds in the middle of the night. Even in here, it seems impossible to keep quiet. If I sit for more than ten seconds after communion in silent prayer, half of you wonder what's wrong, and you get restless because you think we should "get on with it" or that we're wasting valuable time.

I have come to suspect that the reason we can not get comfortable with prolonged silence is that we are afraid to be alone. It must have some roots in our childhood - and something to do with an innate fear

of being alone, and so we cry out to see if anyone is there, turn on the radio or the TV to make sure that someone somewhere is out there.

All of which of course, is why we are here and will soon share a song of this night called Silent. Into the frantic noise of this world, a single, simple Word has been spoken, but this world so deafened by its own noise must struggle to hear. It is the Word Made Flesh, the Word of God, the Word of love, of peace, of healing forgiveness. It is Word for which we must listen, a Word spoken in the silence of the night, at a time when the "world was at peace", says Luke. Probably until we restore that kind of silence we shall not be able to hear that Word again, and find joy in its promise.

New parents must understand this best of all. In the night or in the day, the silence of your sleep is broken by the sound of a baby in your home, and suddenly you know and you remember that you are not alone. This is the wonder, the mystery, and the message of this night. When we become silent, when we are anxious about being alone, there is a baby that cries out to us. If we feel alone because our job is in danger, our savings are shrinking, our future is troubled, there is news in this long anxious night. We are not alone. "Immanuel is the Word: God is with us it means."

But my friends, the Incarnation is not something we celebrate, it is something must become. Christmas is not a feast. It is a way of life: a way of life to which we have been called and empowered to follow. At Bethlehem everything we are has been claimed by God, and no matter how much noise there is from Washington, Wall Street, and Baghdad, there must still silence in the Bethlehem of our hearts so that we may hear that soft spoken word, and let our fears be calmed, for we are not now, never have been, and never will be alone. So the message of an angel is real: "Fear Not." The message of the God who sent the angel is: "I love you." And in the stillness of this night, the message we must share with each other is: "Peace be with you."

Audio Available

409

Feast of the Holy Family

12/28/2008

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 + Psalm 128 + Colossians 3:12-17 + Luke 2:22-40

Fr. Boyer

In an age of isolation and individuality this Gospel is easy to sentimentalize and then dismiss. There are profound, deep, and powerful images and implications in these verses that revealing something of God's will for what we are to become.

The question of what makes this family "holy" is the issue. The shallow response is: "the child, Jesus." Of course, that's it, they think, and with that thought, they are off the hook when it comes to "holiness". In this thinking, for holiness all you need is a few angels, some sheep, shepherds some visitors with unique gifts, a couple of dreams thrown in, and of course, an Immaculate Conception and presto, it's a holy family. Anyone here qualify?

Of course there is something else going on, and when we dig for it, pray for it, and desire it enough, holiness becomes available to every family. You don't need a divine child whose birth was announced by an angel to achieve it.

There are a few clues here that lay out the path to holiness for those who would seek that holiness and its blessings.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus belonged to a people. They were not isolated, nomadic unit. They were not simply a nuclear family, but they were part of a larger religious community.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus kept the law of Moses, and they centered their life on the Temple of Jerusalem which encouraged and assisted them in keeping alive and practicing long-held religious customs.

This is what made them holy: belonging to God's people and living that way made a difference. Living by the laws and the values of that people and fulfilling the obligations of that people makes for holiness. And finally, practicing the customs of that people leads to the holiness desired: but the desire is the important part. Just doing the customs and keeping the rules to look good will not do --- desire "completes the circuit," so to speak.

So, you want a "Holy" family? Chapter two of Luke gives you the plan. It does not guarantee the "perfect" family nor does it promise a life without struggle pain, disappointment or tragedy. It does not necessarily imply a father and a mother all along the way. What it does promise is that the relationships of that family will reveal the presence of God and be the source of God's work of forgiveness, love and mercy.

My wish for you all as a New Year approaches is that you will all be holy.

Audio Available

410

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

1/1/2009

Nm 6:22-27 + Ps 67:2-8 + Gal 4:4-7 + Lk 2:16-21

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

411

Epiphany of the Lord

1/4/2009

Is 60:1-6 + Ps 72:2-13 + Eph 3:2-6 + Mt 2:1-12

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

412

Ordinary Time 2

1/18/2009

Samuel 3:3-10 + Psalm 40 + 1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20 + John 1:35-42

Fr. Boyer

The most fundamental question in life opens the Gospel of John:

"What are you looking for?"

"Security." some would say, and that's not a wrong aim, it's just a low aim.

Anyone with a few years on them knows only too well how fragile that can be.

"A career" others might say. Power, Prominence, Respect, an opportunity to do work they believe they are capable of doing.

Again, not a bad aim, and it might even be high aim if it is motivated by a real desire to be of service rather than simply by personal ambition.

"Peace" some might say; peace with themselves, peace with God, peace with others.

Those however who are to become disciples of Jesus

are not looking for any of those things. They want to know where he is "staying."

Now they are not asking for his address. They want to know his home.

This is not that silly question we often use to start up a conversation with strangers:

"Where're you from?"

To begin with, they knew perfectly well where he is from.

Word was out about him. It's a small place.

They all know where everyone is from,

and in those days one's speech always revealed where someone was from.

Those who would become disciples of Jesus want to know something more than a passing casual conversation is going to reveal.

They want to know where he stays.

They want to know what this place is that makes him so grounded, wise, and steady.

They want to know what he knows which is why they call him "rabbi."

They want to know where he gets all of this,

and he says to anyone willing to ask: "Come and See".

What he shows them in John's Gospel is

a wedding feast in Cana with water and wine,

a Healing at Bethesda's pool,

a Feeding of Multitudes with broken bread that gives life,

a Shepherd like no other that seeks the lost and becomes himself gate,

a guest who calls a dead friend back to life,

and finally they see an empty tomb.

What he shows those will come to see these things

is the difference between a miracle and a sign.

Anyone can see a miracle.

Late this past week, we all heard the news reports of a "Miracle on the Hudson"

as a plane load of people stepped off a sinking plane into waiting boats.

Disciples of Jesus see more than miracles.
They see signs and in those signs, they see where Jesus stays.
They see the coming of the Kingdom and the Reign of God.
They see in Cana the power of Christ's presence
and what happens when we do what he asks as Mary instructs on that occasion.
They see at a pool of water what can happen when one is lifted into it.
They see a bread that leaves no one hungry when broken and shared:
but more than that miracle, they see a sign of Heaven's feast in the Eucharist.
They see that Shepherd who seeks, who finds, who calls, and knows each one by name.
They in Lazarus more than a miracle.
They see a sign of the power of this man's command.
They see more than a stone rolled away. They see a promise kept for a faithful servant.

What are we looking for in this church?
What are we looking for day in and day out in our homes, marriages, and friendships?
What do we want to see? or Who do we want to see?

As you let this Gospel settle into your hearts and minds,
do not miss two little but important details in its telling.
Jesus turns to them.
He is the one who takes the initiative.
He meets them half way.
He is looking for them as well.
And then, don't miss that small detail reporting that it was 4:00 in the afternoon.
It's late, late in the day, getting toward the end. Another day will soon begin.
Maybe it's time for us to begin to wonder what God is looking for.
That you are here in this place at this hour must raise not just the question of what you are looking for,
but what God is looking for in us.
I do not think God is looking for miracles nearly as much
as God might be looking for signs:
signs of our faith, of our hope, of our love.
Or perhaps, just any sign at all that we are listening and ready to come and see.

Audio Available

413

Ordinary Time 3

1/25/2009

Jonah 3:1-10 + Ps 25:4-9 + 1 Cor 7:29-31 + Mk 1:14-20

Fr. Roberson

Audio Available

414

Ordinary Time 4

2/1/2009

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 + Psalm 95 + 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 + Mark 1:21-28

Fr. Boyer

The "amazement" is what I want you to reflect upon with me this morning. It occurs again and again in this gospel. If we fail to reflect upon this amazement and pass over it thinking that power is always amazing. The Word of God falls on deaf ears. There are things that amaze us all the time: good and bad. Watching a lift-off for a trip to the space station is amazing. Watching the power of a tornado even from a distance is amazing. The disciples and people all around Galilee are not amazed at the "power" of Jesus. It is not the violent casting out of an unclean spirit that amazes these people.

Not unlike our own times, the response of these people to evil or to anything that might endanger their holiness was avoidance. They simply did not deal with it. They avoided it. So, what amazes them first of all is that Jesus did not do so. The authority of the past told them to avoid the evil, "pretend it isn't there" is the suggestion. "Stay away, look the other way, and everything will be fine." And so, in some ways, things only got worse. Do not miss the detail that this unclean spirit is inside the synagogue! The holy place is defiled! There is a subtle and fascinating detail in this story. It takes place in a holy place at a holy time: synagogue and Sabbath. Holiness is going to confront evil in a new way, and that's amazing.

A new authority suggests that holiness is not possible by ignoring evil, pretending it isn't there or by looking the other way; and I am not talking about evil in someone else. This is about how one attains to holiness within themselves. If it is not just about clean pots and pans, observing the correct religious diet, and the other minute details of the Jewish Law, neither is about avoiding unclean spirits. Holiness is about getting it out. It is about silencing the tempting voice of evil not pretending it isn't there. This is amazingly new not just back then but today as well.

We have become experts at denial. We have denied ourselves into a national and world-wide economic crisis. We have denied the seductive voice of violence to the point that this evil has entered the holy place of our homes. We have avoided facing the evil of individualism and isolation while the unclean spirit of poverty and sickness lurks all around us spoiling our uneasy peace. We have made boundaries where there ought to be none setting ourselves apart through racism and all kinds of fears and suspicions and then transgressed boundaries with sex and exploitation where there ought to be respect.

A new authority is speaking these days, says Mark. It is an authority that does not allow lesser beings to harm those God loves. That authority says: "Get out!" and it does taking with it the pain it has caused. The Jesus of today's Gospel is not a "play it safe" authority, and "playing it safe" is not the style of his disciples. Again and again, he names evil and he demands that it shut up and get out. Our comfortable accommodation of evil within ourselves will not bring us to holiness nor restore the innocence of baptismal experience. We may hit the floor, so to speak. We may end up being cast down; but if it brings us to holiness, to salvation, to justice, and to the peace of God's Kingdom, then that would appear to be what is happening here.

It is amazing what can happen when we cease denial, avoiding, and pretending in order to embrace the kind of change, conversion, and holiness to which Jesus invites us all.

Audio Available

415

Ordinary Time 5

2/8/2009

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7 + Psalm 147 + 1 Corinthians 9 16-19, 22-23 + Mark 1:29-39

Fr. Boyer

Those silly apostles! They are all excited, and so easily impressed. You can almost feel their mood as they go chasing out to that "deserted place." Mark tells us that it was "early before dawn" that Jesus had gone out there. If we were as familiar with scripture images and language as we ought to be, our minds would have snapped to attention at that phrase, because it is the same words and the same image as Easter morning when some women went seeking the tomb "early before dawn" only to find it empty. So, Mark with his attention to detail has now in just these ten verses put us in the context of the resurrection because just verses before the verb he uses to describe what Jesus does for Peter's mother-in-law is the resurrection verb: "raise up." Remember, this is just the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. He wants us to reflect upon this incident in light of the resurrection which is the whole point of writing the Gospel to begin with.

Yet there are those apostles never quite putting two and two together. My guess is that they pursued Jesus feeling very important. After all, they knew where he was! They were his friends! Suddenly these no-body fishermen are important. They have access to power, and so they pretend to be the great facilitators. "Everyone is looking for you!" they say. Can't you just hear how impressed they are? They think that it's all about the crowds: the bigger the crowd the greater the success. It's all in the numbers they are thinking, while Mark must have smiled as he concludes the Gospel with no one left but a handful: no crowd, no one pursuing Jesus, in fact, even these apostles who are so easily impressed are no where to be found when reality hits.

"What is this reality?" we ought to ask. What is it Jesus is revealing here and why is it that the demons of earlier verses are hushed in the face of such power? Perhaps it is because this is not about power but rather about service. Perhaps it is because this is not about what Jesus can do, but about what God expects us all to do. I have come to believe that Jesus demands that the demons keep quiet because they keep pointing to him, making him the focus of attention, and thereby making it more difficult for Jesus to make his point that we must go and do likewise. To whatever extent we have bought into the thinking of these demons, they have been successful. Spectator Christians are the demons success story. Excusing ourselves from doing what Jesus does because he was the "Son of God" is exactly what the demons are out to accomplish. It puts a stop to the work of God in this world.

This story is not about power. It is about service. It is about seeing what needs to be done, and doing it. Notice that this miracle happens inside Peter's home. There is no one there to see it, no one there to impress. It happens privately because there is human need that Jesus sees and responds to. Miracles are not great demonstrations of divine power performed to stir up crowds of the curious. They are the moments when one human being sees the need of another and quietly responds to that need with the gifts that have. What is more impressive here, Jesus who crosses a room and holds the hand of Peter's mother-in-law or the mother-in-law who gets off a sick bed to take care of guests in her home? I'm not so sure - perhaps both actions are what this is all about.

One thing is certain. Nothing Jesus did was for crowds in spite of how impressed the apostles seem to be by their growing numbers. Jesus knows that the crowds are going to be gone when what he wishes to reveal and teach becomes clear: a message of service, sacrifice, forgiveness, and love. Even today these

things do not draw crowds even of the curious. None the less, this is what he has to say to us and what he will teach us. Eventually the apostles do catch on, and the hope is that we shall as well: catch on to the truth that what is recorded in this Gospel is not here to amaze us, impress us, or excite us. It is not here to prove the divinity or the power of Christ nearly as much as it is to point to what can happen when one person does what ever there is in their power to ease the suffering of another human being.

That is miraculous and it is sure sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God.
Audio Available

416

Ordinary Time 6

2/15/2009

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 + Psalm 32 + 1 Corinthians 10: 31-11:1 + Mark 1:40-45

Fr. Boyer

"Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and he touched him."

If you had been there, you would have recoiled in shock, gasped, and some of us might have run away!

This is astounding, unheard of, forbidden, and frightening!

The holy, the healthy one touched the unclean one.

Think of this! Do not take it for granted.

You may have heard and read this story 500 times; but every time,

if you get it, you cannot help but shudder, wonder, and be amazed.

Simple as it is, this story is the summary of the whole gospel message.

It's not about leprosy.

It's not about Moses.

It's not about begging.

It is about compassion, a hand stretched out, and a touch.

This is about the Incarnation.

It is about the meaning of Jesus Christ, his presence, his life, his mission,

and it is about what happens to us and what we must do because of it.

It is the touch that matters.

It is about the touch of God who through his only son responded in Godly compassion to our condition of alienation and brokenness and did more than touch our human nature. He entered into us: into our social leprosy of polarized racism, into our alienation, loneliness, and brokenness.

This is compassion at its best.

He did not look at us, wonder about our condition, or say: "Isn't that a shame."

He touched it and in doing so, he became what he touched.

As we shall soon remember in Lent, he became broken, alienated, and untouchable as even his friends fled from him in fear, doubt, and disappointment afraid that they might be associated or connected with him.

Notice in the last verses of this story what happens to him.

Mark says: "It was impossible for him to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places."

It would be easy to think that this was because he drew such a crowd; but I would like you to consider that it might have been because he became what he touched - a kind of leper who could not enter the towns openly and remained outside in deserted places.

In terms of those times, by touching that man, Jesus became unclean and would have been required to observe certain customs and rituals of purification.

I would like to propose to you that what this story is really suggesting is that Jesus traded places with that man who knelt before him. Jesus, the clean and holy one, took upon himself that man's infirmity in order to free that man from everything that kept him from life and the relationships that nurtured his life. This is the Good News we preach. This is the Gospel, the whole story in five verses.

Because our wholeness and healing is the will of God, we have been touched and immediately made clean; at least in theory and theology. But, what about in reality?

If it were really true, our likeness to the man in the story would go further. If it were really true, we would be a people who would "publicize the whole matter", as Mark put it. At this point, we go deeper into this story to discover that it does not just tell us something about Jesus, his life and his mission; but it says something about us as well.

The living Word of God is not simply repeating stories about ancient times.

The living Word of God continues to reveal what God is doing today.

Divine Compassion still sees our need and still wills that we be "clean" so to speak.

We are a people who are touched by the hand of God, a God who would trade places with us just to make us whole.

But who talks about this? Who lives every day as though they were touched by God?

Who lives in recognition that everyone around is touched by God?

Who lives with the conviction that in compassion God has traded places with those around us?

The fact is, and the Gospel affirms that when do live this way, people will be coming to Jesus from everywhere.

Until they do because of our testimony and example,

we might just as well stay outside in deserted places, and feeling as though we are might be the first sign that we have not yet come and knelt before Jesus so that he can reach out and touch us with the wonder of divine compassion.

Audio Available

417

Ash Wednesday

2/25/2009

Joel 2:12-18 + Psalm 51 + 2 Corinthians 5: 20-6:2 + Matthew 8:1-6,16-18

Fr. Boyer

It is a season of love that we begin today:

A season that celebrates love's greatest gift, forgiveness.

The forty days we begin now come as an opportunity to remember, to recover, to restore, and heal what ever in us remains broken by sins of pride, greed, laziness, envy.

How we use these days will be the measure of how rooted these sins have become in us, and of how strongly we have grasped the hand of grace that would lift us up.

We have heard often enough the command of Jesus, "Rise".

Last Sunday, the week before, and all through the Gospels, he speaks to the lame and the lost, to the dead and the doubtful: "Rise up."

It is a command and call to us all.

Rise up from what is false and selfish, shallow and empty.

Rise up from what can never make you happy or from what can never bring you peace.

Rise up from greed and all the power abused that oppresses and dims the light of God's glory.

Rise up from laziness that keeps you from prayer and worship - from Mass, sacrifice, and service.

Rise up from the jealous ways of a competitive world that destroys human dignity and life itself.

"Return to me." says God in the words of the prophet; not next week, next month, or next year; not when you have time or when you feel like it; but now. Today. This Lent.

Last Sunday's prophetic reading said this:

"Remember not the things of the past, the things of long ago. See I am doing something new."

That prophet along with Joel today announces what can happen for those who will rise up.

If this season is about forgiveness, then it is about forgetting the things of the past.

At the heart of forgiveness is the willingness not to drag the hurts of the past into the moment and the future. The forgiveness we seek from God must be the forgiveness we enjoy with each other; and "enjoy" is just the right word. For what greater Joy can there be than in knowing that what we have done is the past will not be remembered, drug up again, thrown in our faces, and used to humiliate and destroy us.

In this hope lies the spirit of this season.

Not a time for gloom and doom, sad faces and sorrow, reluctant alms with pocket change.

This is a time and a season for greatness: our greatness because of God's greatness.

It is a time for hope and for a Joy that will explode and burst into flame come Easter night.

A Joy that can stand in darkness with a flame that dispels all fear.

A Joy that springs from sacrifices made out of love,

from fasting that leads to feasting,

and from prayer that will soon proclaim: "He Is Risen".

With the sure and certain knowledge that so shall we rise again.

And today we renew and restore the kind of life worthy of those will surely rise.

Audio Available

418
Lent 1
3/1/2009

Genesis 9: 8-15 + Psalm 25 + 1 Peter 3: 18-22 + Mark 1: 12-15

Fr. Boyer

At my age it is getting increasingly difficult to lose weight. I lose everything with no trouble at all from keys and cell phone to my car in the parking lot, but five or ten pounds or an inch or two from my waist becomes a major effort that requires more concentration and attention than anything I can think of. There are candy bowls all over that office! Any trip to the south that brings me near La Baguette or Panera Bread, and I'm done for. So, I avoid driving the streets that get me there. Have you ever noticed what gets placed just inside the door of the grocery store? Two steps inside and there is a table of cookies, cakes, and pies. To make matters worse, they offer free samples. The other day I came home from lunch and there was a cheese cake on the front seat of my car. What could I do? I was going to lunch and passed that bakery. I decided that it was no accident that I had to go that way so I said: "Ok Lord, if you want me to have a nice cheese cake, make sure there is parking place near the door. If there is no place to park, I'll do without." Would you believe than on the seventh trip around the block a parking spot opened up!

I have a good friend who announces proudly at the conclusion of every purchase of something he does not need that, "God wanted me to have it." We have gotten to the point in our great and long friendship that it is a constant joke between us. I often begin our conversations by asking: "What did God want you to have today?" It has dawned on me that with almost no conscious awareness all of us have slipped into a pattern of negotiations or bartering when it comes to temptation, and I believe that simple little things become big things before we know it. What starts as cheating on a diet might end up with cheating on a spouse or cheating on an expense report.

As a confessor and spiritual director, I more and more recognize how common this thinking has become. "The devil made me do it." is the silly way we often trivialize bad behavior and wrong choices. We just don't want to call it what it is: temptation. It is not a game of manipulation. Temptation is a serious encounter.

If we study the behavior of Jesus in such an encounter, we can learn something helpful. Name the temptation. Call it what it is in particular. No generalizations allowed. Be specific. That is what fixes the situation.

Then name the tempter. It is the only way to stop rationalization as in saying: "I had to take that money from work to pay my mother's hospital bills." No you did not!

Next, practice resistance. Moral training is just like any other training; music or sports. It takes discipline and regular practice. You start small and build up. "No" to a tiny pleasure is how you end up saying "No" to a big one. The amount of money spent at gyms for a personal trainer strikes me as a bit curious when moral or spiritual trainers called: "Confessors" are avoided, maligned, and ignored.

Finally, call for help. Relying on one's own resources alone is programmed failure. Claim the grace that God offers, consult a mentor, but always ask and trust the help of God. This is what Jesus did. He found temptation to be a time and place in which to meet God.

The presence and the power of evil can never be ignored. The human interest in self-gratification and ambition goes right along with it. But temptation need not be a bad thing because in the midst of the struggle between good and evil one will always find God. That is where Israel found God: in the desert. It

is where Jesus found His father: in the wilderness. His experience in temptation changed him, and no doubt made him more humble and more strong. It would be right to believe that it can be the same for us.

In the classic and wonderful work, *Murder in the Cathedral*, T.S. Elliot gives us Thomas Beckett facing a wilderness of loneliness, doubt, confusion, and fear. He reflects that the greatest temptation anyone ever faces is rarely about right or wrong; but most often it is the temptation to do the right thing for the wrong reason. This is the final test we have in our quest for holiness and greatness. It is well to consider it now in the first days of Lent. Doing the right thing for the right reason takes a considerable amount of self-knowledge, humility, courage, and patience to do so; but these are gifts we have and will always discover when we live in the presence of God.

Audio Available

419
Lent 2
3/8/2009

Gn 22:1-18 + Ps 116:10-19 + Rom 8:31-34 + Mk 9:2-10

Fr. Boyer

The opening line of our first reading today sets the focus for our week:

"God put Abraham to the test."

Last week it was a test for Jesus in the desert, and as I said then, such experiences need not simply be a time of trial and temptation.

They may also result in an unmistakable encounter with God who is always there in the wilderness.

Abraham faces a test and meets the God who had promised him so much!

Our Gospel today is also the story of a test - a test for Peter, James, and John.

Jesus is not the only one who has an encounter with the divine on that mountain.

These followers of Jesus have one as well.

Their test is about obedience and about what they see when they look at their Rabbi.

Do they see a carpenter's son who might be a political messiah

leading them to freedom from Roman occupation?

Or do they see someone who will be handed over and rise again?

Can they follow a man whose destiny and whose vision they do not understand?

It is important to notice that their experience on the mountain is communal not individual just as the experience of Pentecost was not private or individual in an exclusive way; but communal and mutually formative and supportive.

This is an experience available to us when we have assembled on this mountain.

What we see here is a "transfiguration" so to speak.

If Peter, James, and John no longer saw a man from Nazareth but the glory of his exaltation, then we no longer see bread on this altar; but what it becomes for us.

If Peter, James and John no longer saw the man they followed up that mountain

but saw the glory of divine life in him, then we no longer see each other just a neighbor or a stranger for by grace that same glory shines in each of us.

If Peter, James, and John heard a voice that said: "Listen to him." So have we.

If Peter, James, and John can take the risk of following Jesus even when they did not understand where he would lead them and what it would mean, so can we.

The risk of standing back and hearing this Gospel as though it was about something that happened to some apostles a long time ago takes the life out of the Word of God.

This is the Living Word that we proclaim here in the midst of a living community.

These are the stories of our faith today with Abraham, Peter, James, and John.

For Jesus, what happens there is strictly an act of God who allowed those apostles to see Jesus in his glory.

For the Apostles, for Abraham, and for us all, we are confronted with a divine command on this mountain: "Listen."

In this season, our time for change is at hand.

It can and it will proceed for those who will listen and heed the voice of God that affirms the importance of Jesus in our lives.

The risk of moving forward when we may not understand is made more possible by the example of Abraham and these disciples. "Playing it safe" has never been the style of serious disciples of Jesus. Knowing all the answers or having perfect understanding has never led anyone the truth either. This is not the posture of a disciple it is simply a pretense and often an excuse for not listening. If you do not always understand what God asks of you, and sometimes are confused about what it seems to mean, just keep listening. That is what led Peter, James, and John deeper into the mystery of Christ in their midst, and it was what ultimately saw God's promise to Abraham fulfilled.

Audio Available

420

Lent 3

3/15/2009

Ex 20:1-17 + Ps 19:8-11 + 1 Cor 1:22-25 + Jn 2:13-25

Fr. Jack

Audio Available

421

Lent 4

3/22/2009

1 Sm 16:1-13 + Ps 23:1-6 + Eph 5:8-14 + Jn 9:1-41

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

422

Lent 5

3/29/2009

Jeremiah 31: 31-35 + Psalm 51 + Hebrews 5: 7-9 + John 12:20 -33

Fr. Boyer

To an age and culture that prizes individuality

this Gospel suggests something that might prove troubling.

To people who find their identity by establishing and maintaining their unique difference from others

this Gospel is almost unintelligible.

Singularity and the ideology of individualism is a hoax;

a lie that is the surest sign of sin's presence in this world.

From the very first reflection on the condition of sinful human kind in Genesis,

to these words of Jesus in John's Gospel

the action and the will of God as been to restore the unity, wholeness and oneness

of creation with the creator. It is not good to be alone!

And so a single grain of wheat opens up this message for us

putting us in touch with what Jesus reveals as the will of His Father.

The example Jesus uses is a grain of wheat.

This is not an agricultural lesson.

The point is not so much the object as it is the singleness.

The adjective, single is the point;

not the noun, wheat.

It is the single grain that dies in its singularity.

What dies is not the wheat, because it brings more wheat.

What dies is singularity, the individuality.

When it falls to the ground it is transformed and ceases to be a single grain.

That death or that passing away

opens the way to life as God has planned and willed it.

For that single grain there will never be a head of wheat

until the individuality passes away.

It is the singleness, the individuality, the separateness that must die

before all the grains it produces can be harvest together.

This is the mystery of the incarnation opening up for us.

Human and Divine separated by sin loose their separate condition and become one.

The work of that One who is the Christ

is the restoration of the oneness of the human condition.

Think of what he does again and again with his signs:

the lepers are restored to their relationship with the community

from which they were separated by that disease;

a dead girl, a centurion's son, the sleeping Lazarus are brought back not just to life,

but restored to the relationships and family to which they belong.

If the signs He works are not enough, listen to the prayer:

"Father, that they may all be one as we are one."

In these verses today, when Jesus exclaims that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, it is his response to the Greeks who have come to Philip and Andrew.

He recognizes that his work is nearly complete.
Those outsiders, those Greeks, are now coming in!
The differences that have kept them apart are going away,
the separate grain dies, and something new is coming to life.

The struggle that Jesus experiences is the struggle we all know only too well.
The individual self dies hard. The independent spirit does not give up easily.
Doing it my way, having my way, doing my thing, keeping my stuff,
is not the way of life in Christ.

We are so locked into this thinking and this behavior.

We start early in life thinking and too often saying: "Look what I did!"

When in truth no one of us every does a thing by ourselves; but we think we have, and we are quick to suggest that there is something grand in that assumption.

This is what it means to die to self or to lose one's life:

It means to lose that separate, individualized, isolated, life
for the sake of being one with all others and the Christ/God.

This was the work of Jesus: to become one and lose himself in others:

to become one with the sinner and the outcast,

to become one with the sick, the hungry, and the thirsty,

to become one with the seekers and questioners, the married at Cana and the single young man who came wanting to be perfect.

He even became one with the dead so that in the isolation of death,
the divine presence might bring them all to rise on the last day.

In this divine plan we discover the meaning of what it means to be church:

not separate congregations doing their own thing.

This is why Paul says in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. All that makes us distinct, separate from one another and therefore from God must die, must pass away.

When it does, the compassion of Christ will be known and shared by all.

We will bear one another's burdens because the burden of one is the burden of all.

The hungry and the homeless will be fed and find shelter

because no one will ever think that the food they have or their home is their own.

Privilege will not mean possessions and power, but rather opportunities and duties.

Remaining a single grain offers no promise of life,

but when all that keeps us apart passes away and we lose that kind of life - we shall be transformed and finally have life everlasting.

Audio Available

423

Passion Sunday

4/5/2009

Mark 1: 1-10 Palm Blessing + Isaiah 50: 4-7 + Psalm 22 + Philippians 2: 6-11 + Mark 14: 1-15

Fr. Boyer

I am not exactly sure what it is or why, but we have so sensationalized the death of Jesus Christ that we have lost something very significant that is right here in the text no matter which of evangelists you read.

The truth of the matter is that there were at least three executions that day outside Jerusalem. There may well have been more.

It was a very common and ordinary event.

Internal disputes among the Jews were common as well.

The factions pushing and shoving for power and influence were at each all the time.

Pilot was there because of it. He knew their intrigues.

He knew how to play them against one another.

Keeping them divided was the easiest way to keep them in check.

It did not take much to draw a crowd in those days, especially during the seasons of High Holy Days. Outside of the Temple and its rituals, there wasn't much to do.

Children did what children do: they play games, march around, sing, and dance.

They play with sticks and branches and anything else they can find.

The children of Jerusalem knew the rituals and the story of the Feast of Tabernacles, its procession with branches waving in the wind was deep in their imaginations.

Roman soldiers did what Roman soldiers do:

they oppress, torment, humiliate, and they steal.

Paid little, far from home in a very alien and unfriendly land, they took the spoils and what was left from those they executed day after day.

What's the big deal here?

Nothing; and that is the tragedy of it.

This death we have just recalled was perfectly ordinary and perfectly legal.

There is no blaming Pilot, the Jews, the Sanhedran, Herod, or the High Priest.

This death was not some rare insanity of a few evil people.

There is a deeper flaw, a deeper tragedy to be addressed that will not allow blame or the shifting of responsibility by sensationalism.

The people in this Gospel are convinced

that they are acting rightly, morally, and justly.

What frightens me is that Christ was executed by good people.

The same people who brought the Palms brought the Cross.

The fault here is not that they were evil or bloodthirsty,

but that they were complacent. so complacent and easily swayed that they shout "Hosanna" one day and "Crucify Him the next."

What ought to disturb us most of all with this scene is not the cross but the crowds.

Tools of execution are common enough: guns, gas chambers, electric chairs, ropes, chemicals in syringes, pills, swords, rocks and clubs.

Sadly what is just as common and the harshest image of all is a crowd doing nothing.

Standing there, ready to watch if there is something interesting, and just as ready to move on if there is none.

No one seems to say: "Stop this?"

The only one who questions what Jesus has done to deserve death is Pilate!

What irony is this?

To whatever extent we are still part of the crowd, we are part of the tragedy, the injustice, the sadness of life.

We cannot hear this Gospel and wonder, "What was wrong with those terrible people."

Everyone of us has stood around and said nothing in the face of unjust, evil, and cruelty. It happens everywhere from school yards to corporate offices.

Jesus shows no anger at the crowd, or to those who nailed his hands;

but He did have strong words for the luke-warm, those who never could speak up, stand up, question and step out of the crowd's fickle mediocrity.

As we ponder the events of our religious past against the events of our own time, rather than be appalled or sorrowful about what happened in Jerusalem a long long time ago, we might take a closer look at our own passion or lack of it for justice, for truth, for peace and for life itself.

Audio Available

424

Holy Thursday

4/9/2009

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14 + Psalm 116 + 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 + John 13: 1-15

Fr. Boyer

The hour has come. Lent comes to a close now. The great hymn, "Gloria" which we have not sung since the Sunday before Ash Wednesday brings the season to a grand and glorious conclusion. Now begins the Sacred Triduum, the Three Holy Days when we shall remember what Jesus has asked us to do in his memory, and tomorrow look upon the crucified man of sorrows, the suffering servant on the altar and throne of the cross. It is a lot to take in, but tonight and tomorrow lead us to Saturday night when we shall make sense of it all in the darkness enlightened by the Word of God and sing once again that great hymn of Glory.

Again and again in John's Gospel we have been told that the hour has not yet come. Then this past Sunday we heard Jesus announce as those Greeks come to see him that Jesus knows his hour has come. In a stunning reversal of roles, the teacher, the Lord, the Master, the Son of God, the Son of David, the Son of Man, the Messiah (call him everything you can) girds himself as servant and crawls around on the floor to wash feet.

It is a startling image of God, a God on the floor, bent down, kneeling. It is a humble God the Jesus reveals. The challenge of this image makes as much impact on us as it did to the disciples and a protesting Peter. Where is the God of anger and wrath? Where is the God of power and might? Where is the God who slew enemies, who strikes down opposition, who crushes the infidel? Where is the God in radiant robes on a throne with servants and angel / choirs? Where is this feared omnipotent one who speaks in mystery through a burning bush to tell Moses: "I Am"?

That God is in an upper room down on the floor and the treasures offered him are human feet, dusty, worn, tired, split, calloused, swollen, blistered and dirty. Something is wrong with this picture thinks the Peter inside of us. Yet, something is right says the Jesus wrapped in a towel.

Feet tell a lot about us, and we like to keep them hidden, covered with socks and shoes. If not, we're off to pedicure and paint to distract from the blemishes most of us would rather hide. Our feet tell our story. They tell where we have been and where we should not have been. They carry our burdens, they bear the first scars of our journeys. They sweat and smell. They ache and twist with age. There is something a little daunting about placing our bare feet before another, exposing them to be touched and washed by another. It is the same for the one touching and washing.

But it is God who does the touching, the washing, the healing. It is God who accepts those feet and the story they tell and the burden they bring. It is the humble God that Jesus offers to those who will offer their feet and all the burdens those feet carry from place to place and day to day.

A humble God looks for humble people. That's the story of this day, and it is what we are invited to remember. He never said: "Be sure to remember how I cured the blind and the deaf, the mute and the crippled or those possessed by demons; how I forgave prostitutes and ate with sinners." The one thing Paul tells us he did ask us to do in his memory concerned what we do at this table.

Here we remember what Jesus has done for us. We recall his saving deeds in the Eucharistic Prayer, how

he suffered and died for us, rose from the dead and sent the Holy Spirit. He comes to us each time we gather here as he did to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and because of that, we come here week after week to share what he has done for us and how we have seen him. Strengthened by the Spirit that comes upon us in this place, we then begin to be what he has been for those who are sick, desperate, and lonely.

The more we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, the more we become the Body of Christ. To share in his glory we will find our way into his sufferings. Betrayed, mocked, ridiculed, and asked to carry a cross, we will fall from time to time; but we will get up again assured of victory. We will be Simon of Cyrene for each other and carry one another's burdens. We will be Veronica as well and tenderly wipe each other's face. We will go down on our knees humbly before one another, and we will break and share bread transformed and transforming us into the Body of Christ. We will profess over and over again that we believe in the resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come, and that Christ will come again.

Audio Available

425

Good Friday

4/10/2009

Isaiah 52: 13-53, 12 + Psalm 31 + Hebrews 4: 14-16, 5: 7-9 + John 18:1-9, 42

Fr. Boyer

Time, culture, and familiarity have just about insulated us from the reality of what we remember today.

We have managed to become immune to the reality of what happened in Jerusalem and what continues to happen around us.

The self-proclaimed "civilized" society in which we live now avoids passion, and when it is observed,

it is either distant from us as an admirable quality of a few or an always to be avoided behavior seen in those different from us.

The inevitable consequence of this is a wrong conclusion that Christ had to die on a cross and that he chose to do so.

That thinking is somehow an attempt to distance ourselves from the harsh and brutal reality of what happened.

The truth is it repels us.

We are appalled by it.

So it is tempting to take refuge in the thought that it was God's will even though we do not understand why God would will such a thing.

It is a way of finding a comfort that shields us from the truth.

God did not will His son to be condemned as a criminal and executed.

Jesus Christ did not choose to be crucified.

He chose to be faithful not matter the consequences.

The fact is, Christ died because human beings chose to kill him.

This was not some divine plan.

The powerful figures in this account all had a part to play.

The Pharisees, Peter, Judas, Pilate, Herod, James and John, his closest friends:

any one of them could have stopped it, but they did not do so.

 The Pharisees could have stopped it all, but to them, Christ was an impurity who broke the tradition of Moses. There is no reason to think they were evil. They were simply complacent and very self-satisfied. They fell into the trap of assuming that challenges only come from enemies.

 Judas surely believed that his own vision should be Christ's vision. He must have thought that he could force the issue by putting Christ on the spot. I suspect that he was actually a very dedicated man who had simply become too narrow, too caught up in his plans and vision: another deadly trap.

 Peter the Rock, knew a moment of betrayal and panic. We've all been there. One split second and a bad decision. It is easy to understand Peter. He was afraid. Fear does terrible things to people. It does terrible things to us.

 Pilate the intellectual. He wants to debate or argue. "What is Truth?" Meanwhile he tries to read the crowd. He wants to please. Should he release Barabbas or Jesus? What will please the crowd? What will please the Emperor? So, the last result of a people pleasing politician is? Do nothing at all. He washes his hands, claims it's not his concern and that way he doesn't get hurt.

So the cross goes up because no one stopped it.
It happens all the time, not just on Good Friday.
At least part of the Goodness ought to be because it does not have to be.
This world never needs to be narrow or small.
We never need to be trapped by our own assumptions and self-satisfaction.
We never need to argue or make that one wrong snap decision.
We have nothing to fear.
That is not God's plan and neither was the cross in God's plan.
Two days from now we shall remember what God's plan is:
a world full of hope,
full of joy,
as full of goodness as God's boundless power and mercy.
A world full of life.
Audio Available

426

The Great Vigil of Easter

4/11/2009

Vigil Readings & Mark 16: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

In the era of human civilization, human scientists can mark the Iron Age and the Bronze Age with the discovery of these things and their impact on human life and history. Then I suppose the development of the wheel, electricity, and the printing press ought to be counted, and perhaps many other moments that left their mark on human life. But none of them compares to the inaugural event that forever changed this world: the resurrection of Christ. It does not make any difference whether you believe it or not. The impact, the consequences are unmistakable as the lives of those who experienced and witnessed it began to change the course of human history.

Once every twelve months on the Sabbath after the first full moon of the spring equinox, people like us everywhere on this earth assemble in the night - at an hour that is in-between. We are between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We are between the death of Christ and the Resurrection. We are between sunset and sunrise. In a sense, for a moment, time is suspended giving us a space in which to reflect upon how we use time and what happens in time.

How we live in time shapes the quality of our relationships with ourselves and with others; with the world and with God. Too many of us seem to see time as something to be ticked off, or counted down wishing they had done things differently, looking back. This moment in here suggests that we would do better to look forward and live in anticipation of what will happen next.

Here in the darkness of this Easter Vigil we are between times.

We know darkness, sometimes far too well and too often:

and in that darkness we search for meaning in our lives and the world around us.

Here in the darkness of this Easter Vigil we practice, we practice waiting.

It is the crux of our faith this waiting, and if we practice it well,

we shall endure other times of waiting that come: waiting for a birth, waiting for the results of a medical test, waiting for a loved one to breath their last, waiting for our own last moments.

Here in the darkness we remember who we are and whose we are,

We gather in community to keep company in the dark because it is frightening and lonely without another.

It is so easy to fall into the violence, greed, and narcissism of this age,

and so we sit in the dark to remember that we have embraced another way of life,

and that along with those who keep this vigil we do not turn back for like the Israelites whose story we told again, we go forward even if the way is uncertain:

forward to grow in relationship to God.

Together we can face the unknown, the unfamiliar, and trust God for what is to come.

Mary Magdalene and the others show us how.

Although frightened, they pressed forward facing the challenges that assaulted their faith.

A new day dawned, and it was time to carry on with life even in the midst of death.

When they arrived at that tomb, they were surprised that he was not there.
Even though they could not possibly have understood what it could mean,
what began in the darkness of an uncertain night
was now beaming with possibilities and newfound hope.
It is when we choose to live in the face of what looks like death
that God most often surprises us with a glimmer of light
and will carry us into a new day.
We have held that glimmer of light tonight,
and we have shared in this darkness.
We must continue to do that, and when we do,
we shall live in time and in the future.
Audio Available

427

Easter Sunday

4/12/2009

Acts of the Apostles 10: 34, 37-43 + Psalm 118 + Colossians 3: 1-4 + John 20: 1-9

Fr. Boyer

Matthew says:

"After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene came with the other Mary to inspect the tomb. Suddenly there was a mighty earthquake, as the angel of the Lord descended from heaven. He came to the stone, rolled it back, and sat on it."

Mark says:

"Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were saying to one another, 'Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? When they looked, they found that the stone had been rolled back. (It was a huge one.)'"

Luke says:

"The women came to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled back from the tomb."

You just heard John say:

"Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away."

If all four evangelists write about the stone, it is a big deal. It is important.

There is something about this stone moving that carries with it a message worth our notice this glorious day. However getting that message is not easy if we continue to think that the stone was there to keep Jesus in. I would propose to you that we have the whole thing backward. The point is not that there was a stone closing the tomb, but that the stone has been rolled away opening the tomb. Open tombs, just like open doors are not open just to let people out.

Some ancient cultures have believed that tombs were a gateway to the next life.

That is good thinking. It is certainly Gospel thinking. We need that stone rolled back.

We need that tomb open, not to let Jesus out, but to let us in. Peter and John went into that tomb, and they emerged with a new life, a new mission, a new way of seeing and believing. It will be no different for us if we want to be counted among the chosen, the believers. What ever stones get in the way must go. They must be rolled back.

We have to die and face a tomb or two or there is no way we shall really live. The point is to live, not to survive. People who have not faced a tomb, only survive for another day to survive again. We are not called by God to be survivors who scratch around in this life defending and protecting ourselves, fearful of what will come next to threaten what we have and what we have stored away.

We are called to Life - called to Live,

and the only way to that life is through the tomb.

There are in this life a thousand deaths and more.

Times when there is loss or change and we think we are going to die.

Times when bad news comes and we die of fear and sorrow. There are people in this assembly who live this day with sadness and an empty place at the table, parents who have lost children and discouraged men and women who have lost jobs and savings.

This sadness is the sadness of the tomb. Yet for those who know the story of an open tomb in Jerusalem this sadness is not the end.

Something happens in tombs for those who are attentive to the will and word of God. Pay attention to Jesus in these accounts of the tomb and resurrection. The verb in the gospel is in the passive voice grammatically: "He has been raised." Jesus is not the actor here, he has been acted upon. He did nothing except fulfill the will of God and accept the consequence of doing so. Because of that, God acted upon him raising him to new life.

It is this news that gives us hope and confidence that whatever death we may face, sadness, disappointment, or tragedy if we have fulfilled the will of God we shall be raised from any grief or loss that has put us down. God acts upon those who are faithful. To anyone who has ever cried out: "God, Why?" "Why have you forsaken me?" there is an answer. God's action in the tomb is God's answers that question. The news today is that the stone has been rolled back: the stone that would leave us defeated by evil, sorrow, sadness, or grief; the stone that would not give us access to that action of God who will raise us again and again, as many times as it takes for us to really live.

Life is what God is about.

Life is the Will of God.

Life is the surest sign of God's presence.

Life is the consequence of a willingness to die to self, to sin, to selfishness.

I have this idea that some might find slightly irreverent, but I think that Jesus lived in a state of constant surprise. I believe he was surprised when Peter, Andrew, James and John quit their jobs to follow him. I believe he was surprised when Matthew left his desk in the tax office and came along. I feel sure he was just as surprised as the wine steward who tasted that wine in the water jugs at Cana and raved about its quality. I think he was surprised when Peter's mother-in-law got up after he touched her. I think much of his life was a pleasant surprise, even the day he called for Lazarus and he actually came out of the tomb. Think how much more wonderful it is to imagine these events as surprises rather than as just something ordinary in the life of a miracle worker. With that thought then, imagine how surprised Jesus was that morning to discover what God could do with and for him.

My Easter prayer and my hope for you my friends is that having been faithful to the will of God you will be surprised again and again and what Life God has planned for you. May every Sunday be another Easter for each of you, and may you be surprised to find that the stones that keep you from truly living have been rolled back.

Audio Available

428

2nd Sunday of Easter

4/19/2009

Acts 4:32-35 + Ps 118:2-24 + 1 Jn 5:1-6 + Jn 20:19-31

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

429

3rd Sunday of Easter

4/26/2009

Acts of the Apostles 3, 13-115. 17-19 + Psalm 4 + 1 John 2, 1-5 + Luke 24, 35-48

Fr. Boyer

Sometimes I am almost overwhelmed at the thought of what we are and what is happening to us in the place, in this church, our Jerusalem. It frightens me sometimes to wake up from routine and remember what happens to us in here. We are so casual, so complacent, and so comfortable. You come late, sometimes I come unprepared. It's the same thing. We slip into the role of spectators. With arms folded you stand and sit, kneel and sign yourselves. I watch you and you watch me sometimes. Most of the time we listen to the Word of God as though it were a story someone is reading about the good-old days. Our imaginations, if they are working at all dwell on the past, and we get stuck remembering what God HAS done, what Jesus HAS said, what happened in that Jerusalem as though it was over, finished, and done with.

Then sometimes I wake up and I get it. It dawns on me again that this is Jerusalem, and what we proclaim in here is about today, not way back then. The one who speaks to us all is Jesus raised from the dead. But because we keep looking backward, we don't recognize him. We are like those men and women in Jerusalem who kept thinking about those times before the death and resurrection. In that kind of thinking there is no future and nothing to do much less anything to become.

Last week, we heard an experience in Jerusalem. While Thomas may have been the one who spoke the feelings of many, the incident was really about Jesus and about what happens to someone who is raised from the dead by God because of their obedience to and commitment to God's Will. Today we hear an experience that is not about Jesus, but rather about people who gather around a table in Jerusalem and look into God's Word to understand what is happening to them in that place.

It is not hard to understand the experience of the apostles and their closest friends. No one has been raised from the dead before. They have nothing to relate this experience to except ghost stories, and so they do. For a brief time, they are stuck looking backward, remembering the past, longing for it, sad that it seems to be over, and not quite sure what it means or what to do about it. So they sit together and ponder the Scriptures waiting. Some of them try going back to their old ways, they fish again, they walk home to Emmaus; but the truth is, there is no going back.

This week it is about them, about how difficult it is to grasp the fact that someone has been raised. They kept thinking it was a ghost. Ghosts for most people interested are the "so-called spirits of the dead". What stands before them in Jerusalem is not the spirit of a dead man. It is someone alive enough, real enough, present enough to eat! How to understand this is the question with which they struggle, and so they are led to search the Scriptures for insight and understanding. The one who appears to them affirms their search but tells them that it will take another witness, more testimony, before this resurrection transformation can be believed, understood, and appreciated for what it really means. That witness is the Spirit which He will send. When that Spirit comes, the transformation of Jesus will no longer be the remarkable experience because their own transformation will open their eyes and their hearts. They will be the ones transformed.

And so it happens Luke tells us, but not just for them. We too are in Jerusalem trying not to look backward while pondering the scriptures to see and understand what is happening to us. We are aware

that people all around us seem to be getting it - seem to be grasping the meaning and being transformed by it. Just as Apostles burst out of that room and out of their timid uncertain selves to preach, proclaim, forgive, and heal, we see it happening. Men like Stan Rother, a little nun in Calcutta, a courageous priest a sister and laypeople with a vision of the Kingdom of God living in Haiti's poverty and disease, mothers and fathers forgiving each other and sacrificing everything for their children, young men choosing a seminary rather than careers of prominence and power. Nurses, Doctors, Teachers touching other lives with compassion and gentleness!

It's everywhere, this victory of the resurrection with its transformation. How can we understand this? The Scriptures read not as a history lesson, but read under the power of the Spirit opens minds and hearts to discover and embrace a God who wills us to be free, forgiven, loving, caring, and faithful stewards of his gifts.

We are in Jerusalem today, and Christ is in our midst. Some may think its just the memory of a dead man; but we are invited to touch and see, listen and understand.

If you are here today, you are people of the resurrection having made the choice to come to Jerusalem. Yet we are surrounded by too much darkness and death. We allow ourselves individually and as communities of faith to succumb to the trivialization of our faith rather than proclaim the call to repentance and conversion by our own transformed lives. You don't need a pulpit to proclaim the resurrection. You do it in your kitchen, on the phone, at work over coffee. By the power of God's Spirit we are witnesses to the dawning of God's new order for the world: a world free of anger, hatred, lies, self-serving behavior, pride, and any other deed of darkness.

At the beginning of his ministry, the Spirit came upon Jesus. That same Spirit has come upon us and our ministry has begun once we understand what is written in these scriptures. The same experiences available to the apostles are available to this apostolic church even if corporal appearances of the risen, ascended and exalted Jesus have ceased for a time. Opened eyes and opened minds communing with Jesus are what it takes to see clearly and comprehend with discernment what we are becoming here. When you start to get the point, it ought to be enough to scare you, and prompt you to say: "Come Holy Spirit" for without it, we shall remain only spectators all the way to the end. I don't want to be a spectator when everyone else is rising from the dead.

Audio Available

430
Confirmation 2009
4/26/2009

Abp. Beltran

Audio Available

431

4th Sunday of Easter

5/3/2009

Acts 4:8-12 + Ps 118:1-29 + 1 Jn 3:1-2 + Jn 10:11-18

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

432

5th Sunday of Easter

5/10/2009

Acts of the Apostles 9, 26-31 + Psalm 22 + 1 John 3, 18-24 + John 15: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

We must be very careful about how we hear and how we use the word: "True" which John puts on the lips of Jesus in today's Gospel.

The word for "true" in Greek means a lack of forgetfulness.

It has nothing to do with being right or wrong, true or false.

For those of us who find our identity within the Roman Catholic Church, our claim to be the "true" church does not imply that another is false.

It simply suggests that we do not forget.

We do not forget our past, forget our tradition, and forget our roots in the apostles, and the teachings of Jesus about unity, forgiveness, fidelity, and love.

The true vine is "true"

because it does not forget its communion with all there is and the source of all there is.

Never did Jesus forget where he came from, and so he was never in doubt about where he was going.

Never did Jesus forget who he was as the Father's Son.

Never did he think that he was on his own living his life, doing his thing, becoming his own man.

He was "true", and so he could say: "I am the Truth."

Trouble entered this world when forgetfulness occurs.

Eve forgot what God had said; forgot that she was created and God was Creator.

Trouble still enters this world when we forget the Will of God that we all be one, when we forget that we must love one another,

when we forget to forgive,

or forget that we are commanded to feed each other, and bear one another's burdens.

Trouble comes when we forget that we all come from the same God

that we are all brothers and sisters,

that we are here to live in harmony with each other not in competition;

or forget that peace is the fruit that springs from the vine of justice.

If we are grafted onto the True Vine, then we cannot forget

or else we shall be pruned away.

We must be True like the vine to which we are grafted and our truthfulness comes from that connection.

I have spoken of this image with you before.

In the church where I studied for the priesthood there is a stained glass window

before which I have stood and prayed on many occasions.

In the center of the bottom panel a tree rises up with a great trunk and luxurious branches.

It bears red ripe apples.

On either side stand a man and woman

who are recognized because she reaches up for some of the fruit.

She takes when she should be receiving.

In the panel above that one,

the same tree trunk extends upward but changes into a vine loaded with rich ripe grapes.
The vine twists and turns upward into a third panel
and that vine becomes the wood of a cross on which Christ hangs helplessly in death.

In my mind, Jesus is grafted to the cross, to the vine, and ultimately to that everlasting symbol of the garden which we ought not forget because that was where and was when we were True: to the Will of God, the Plan of Salvation, and most true to the nature into which we were born.

Our only hope to be True: truly human, truly holy, truly church
is to remain on the vine, even though it is a vine that will be pruned now and then so that it can be fruitful.

Jesus and his first followers knew quite well that the fruit on the vine only comes from new growth.
Our only hope to avoid being fuel for the fire is to be made new again and again
by the pruning of conversion, discipline, sacrifice, and sometimes suffering.

In our chapel the crucifix on the south wall has a vine weaving itself out of and around the cross.
You might take another look at it someday soon and ponder the meaning of that cross and that vine
and how it is that we might become True.

Audio Available

433

6th Sunday of Easter

5/17/2009

Acts of the Apostles 10:25-26 + Psalm 98 + 1 John 4, 7-10 + John 15: 9-17

Fr. Boyer

Worse than a pandemic of flu and more harmful even than HIV or AIDS

is another illness spreading through the human community in our time.

It is wearing away at human relationships and isolating people.

It reveals a profound truth that this Gospel addresses today.

The sickness spreading among us is internet porn, and no one is safe from it.

Addiction to it begins like any chemical addiction: first simply through curiosity

and then before you know it (and that's the important part: BEFORE) a little is not enough.

It has invaded the finest homes and is a secret that worms its way into lives and hearts.

With shame and confusion it leaves helpless those who are trapped by its lure.

In the end it is an epidemic of loneliness and self doubt:

a painful condition medicated away wrongly by a cyber person

who will never reject us and is available on demand at the click of a mouse.

Usually some cyber face better looking than anyone we would risk meeting in real life appears

all because we fear that they would take a second look at us in real life.

It's all about desire: the desire for another person.

That desire is buried deep in our bones, and this desire is different from other desires.

We desire chocolate or peanut butter cups, some new gadget, or clothing.

We desire success and money - but these desires are for our sake.

The desire for another person at its best is when we desire them for their sake

not as a possession but as a partner.

We desire them for what we can give them, do for them, and provide for them;

not for what they can do for us like money and success, or chocolate.

There is something different here.

But that's not all; we also find a desire that they desire us.

Our desiring makes them valuable. Their desire makes us valuable.

Here is where today's Gospel begins to speak to us.

It is a Gospel full of love.

Jesus wants to be loved revealing God's desire to be loved.

We want to be loved ultimately unfolding our desire for God.

I believe that the essence of being human is the desire to be desired by the one we desire.

The words Jesus will speak in today's Gospel are the last he will speak before he makes his way to the cross. They are the last words of the Gospel we shall hear before we celebrate the Ascension.

Now we know why Jesus has come among us, and now we know what His father wants to say to us.

"Remain in me!" He says. "Remain in my love."

This is divine desire for us on the lips of Jesus.

The desires that stir in us all spring from the depth of our humanity,

and no matter what they are on the surface, it is always and ultimately our desire for the one who

desires us. The essence of being human is the desire to be desired by the one we desire.

Everyone one of us knows that even when a desire is satisfied, it is less than perfect.
If that taste of a piece of chocolate was perfect, we would never reach for the second piece.
If some other person was perfect in desire with us, it would never wane or get distracted.
If some other person was perfect, we would never look at another
Yet the truth is, no one can ever meet our needs, match our wants or complete our desires.
We always desire more. Intellectually we understand this through our spiritual tradition;
but somehow we fail to integrate that understanding into our experience.

In other words, we know that the root of our desire is for God,
and we understand the revelation of scripture that God desires, loves, and cares for us;
but we split our love into two compartments.
We elevate love of God and spiritualize it, and in effect, we de-humanize God's love,
and this is a problem.

We have to keep our love on a single level.
We have to understand that our desire for piece of pie or four scoops of ice cream is part of our desire
for God, and that our desire for peace is a desire for divine shalom; that our desire for another person is
a participation in our desire for God.
Every desire leads to God if it is a good desire.
Each of us is a living throbbing desire to be desired by the God we desire.

That God is not found on a computer screen or a chat room.
All we find there is ourselves.
That's the difference between a cyber relationship and a marriage covenant.
In fact, it is what make marriage a covenant and sacrament,
because in that sacred relationship the desire for God is ordered into a desire for another who desires
us.
It is the same with a Eucharistic community.
Our hunger for God finds its expression in our hunger to be here together.
God's hunger for us finds its expression in God's desire to feed us with this sacrament.

And so that God speaks to us today with desire and longing that is not just spiritual.
It is real, human, powerful, and healing. "Remain in me."
It echoes the plea of those disciples on their way to Emmaus: "Stay with us."
It is the cry of the church a week before the Ascension of Jesus. "Do not leave us."
It is the cry of God in the human heart: "Do not leave me."
It is the cry of the church to its young people; "Do not leave us."
Here we learn the meaning of desire.
Here we learn the meaning of love.
Audio Available

434

The Ascension of the Lord

5/24/2009

Acts 1:1-11 + Ps 47:2-9 + Eph 1:17-23 + Mk 16:15-20

Fr. Buckley

Audio Available

435

Pentecost

5/31/2009

Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11 + Psalm 104 + Galatians 5: 16-25 + John 15: 26-27, 16: 12-15

Fr. Boyer

Wind and Fire is something we know about in Oklahoma. Unfortunately because of the destruction wind and fire bring in this climate, there is not much positive thought provoked by the thought of the two. But for people rooted in the images and stories of the Scriptures it is different. From the Bible's Book of Beginnings: "Genesis" wind brings life sweeping over the primordial waters bringing with it order and wondrous harmony in the universe.

An east wind at their back enabled the Israelites to cross a Sea. For Job an experience of the living God occurred in a whirl-wind. Ezekiel's prophetic visions were carried on winds, and when his ministry ended Elijah assumed his role only to be swept up to God in a whirling wind.

Over and over again, fire breaks out in the history of God's presence with his people. A covenant with Abraham is sealed with a sacrificial fire. Moses is summoned to his mission and purified before a burning bush. He leads Israel through the desert with a pillar of fire assuring all who followed that their path was God struck and protected.

To this day, a torch of fire initiates Olympic Games, candle light vigils mark tragic deaths, and "eternal flames" burn at sacred places and tombs. We get the idea, but yet we somehow do not make the deeper connections. Saint Luke in Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul in his Letters, and Saint John give us a way to connect the dots, so to speak, and move ahead because Pentecost is not a feast or day on the Calendar. It is a people who live by the Spirit, who are filled with the Spirit, who more than knowing something about Jesus have begun to do something about Jesus.

In our fascination with things we can hold, touch, and control, our Baptisms leave some to wonder and even ask if we have been Baptized by the Spirit. The question bears witness to the lack of fire in our lives. Water flows on the outside, but Spirit must burn within not to destroy but to purify, to cleanse, and fortify. We listen to the evidence of the Spirit Luke describes with rich biblical images in Jerusalem but we get all distracted by silly details only made worse by the rendition of that day artists have left us with a carefully arranged group of over-robed people sitting around with their eyes rolling up in surprise at tiny flames overhead as though they were afraid their hair might catch fire!

That is not Pentecost! What Luke and Paul and John describe as Pentecost consists of people who take courage, who have burst out of their individualistic private little selves to become one, and a people who know peace. Pentecost is the consequence of the incarnation: this day is the reason we celebrated Christmas. It is the presence of God in human life. Pentecost is the indwelling of God's Spirit, God's Life in the human family.

We shall have that Spirit and know that Spirit when we live with courage in the face of anything that is opposed to God's Life and Presence. That Courage does not mean there is no fear. Only a fool has no fear. Courage means that fear is not in control and we are not afraid to speak, to act, to live as people of God while remembering that every other living being holds the same spirit making their lives precious and holy in God's sight. The Spirit of God is not selective, exclusive, nor contained or controlled by anyone but God. That promised Spirit has come upon the whole earth to renew the earth and everyone on the earth. That Spirit is not the privilege of a few or an institution; for our history reveals countless

times when a single spirit-filled person of courage said: "No." or "There is another way." They are the likes of Francis and Catherine, Ignatius, or Becket. Pentecost People have the Spirit, and we know them by the fruits of their lives more than by their names. Paul gives us some clues to look for.

We shall have that Spirit and know that Spirit when the human family is more important than nationalistic self interest. People everywhere from here to pirates in Asian Seas are so involved in their national interests that they fail to consider other national interests. In an interconnected world, local effects have global repercussions. Riches in another region result in poverty elsewhere. The good life in one country is financed by impoverishing lives in another. A coffee picker in one country could eat for a week with what we spend of mocha late. Africans live in chaos today because colonizers wanted the resources of that land to live more comfortably at home so they arbitrarily divided up that continent into manageable artificial countries without respecting ancient tribal enmities, and then we get shocked when tribes kill each other

All of this is beyond our personal control, and huge injustices spring from structural evil; but we are not without guilt because we benefit from the system that creates our wealth and live in a sinful situation. If one of the fruits of the Spirit is oneness it has something more to do with the whole human family than with patriotic songs or team spirit over a game. That Spirit awakens us to a moral obligation to spend less on ourselves separating us from evil structures and leading us to give to the poor strengthening our communion with them. As long as we are divided between us and them, we are separated from the Kingdom of God.

The dying breath of Jesus was the breath of peace and forgiveness. The beginning of peace is in the human heart, and a heart that refuses forgiveness knows no peace. It is in a peaceful heart that Christ dwells, and from that heart flow joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity and self control. When we grow in the spirit of peace, peace will come, and not until then.

When the wind blows, the seeds of Good News are scattered everywhere. With the wind at their back, that crowd in Jerusalem: all of them, not just twelve began to spread seeds of unity and joy, life and hope, justice and peace. With fire in their souls they started something that caused every empire of the world to take notice. If what happened in Jerusalem is just a story from a day long ago dissolving into distant memory with no bearing on our present experience then it's time for a new Pentecost in this place, in our lives. God's wind still blows and God's fire still burns, and the Spirit of Jesus still breathes on us. Knowing this however is not enough. What are we to do? we must ask.

Audio Available

Deuteronomy 4:32-34,39-40 + Psalm 33 + Romans 8: 14-17 + Matthew 28: 16-20

Fr. Boyer

Over the forty-one years of my priesthood I acknowledge a lot of growth and am always grateful for the patience, endurance, and good humor of countless people who have stood, sat, and knelt in front of me. I have looked at faces glazed over with boredom, deep concern, and into the eyes of holy people deep in prayer. I have recognized the critic, who like Scribes and Pharisees sit and wait to trap or trip me up. I have also seen a few backsides as some have stalked out or pinched their baby into crying so that they might make a hasty escape.

All of this comes to mind on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity as this book calls this day. I am always amused at the title some have now applied to this Feast. The superlative adjective, "most" might imply that there was a comparative "More Holy Trinity" suggesting two, or simply a "Holy Trinity" when there are no other Trinities to compare. Personally, I am content with one: "The Holy Trinity." One is enough to wrap your mind around. One of the remarkable signs of growth in my life other than size is the fact that I am now content with just one, and that I no longer schedule my retreat, my vacation, or an illness to coincide with the Sunday after Pentecost. There was a time in my life when I did everything possible to avoid preaching on the Feast of the Holy Trinity. That phase followed an earlier first phase when I loved to preach about the Holy Trinity. When in the vigor of my youth I provided barely breathing congregations long expositions of this theological truth and reasoning to support and affirm our faith. I think that came about from the childhood memory of being told by countless well meaning religious sisters that the Trinity was a "Mystery" I couldn't understand. Of course, that's all I needed as a child was to be told I couldn't do something or that something was a mystery. It's like giving a child a beautifully wrapped box and saying you can't open it.

Finally I got over my early enthusiasm as a priest and wore out all the theological jargon I had learned and decided to take a vacation after Pentecost leaving this feast to some poor substitute who probably said, "yes" when asked to take my place without looking at the calendar of feasts! Which brings us to today: Here I am. For several years now, I have been over it. You get no graduate level lecture on the scholastic idea of the Trinity, and I have already taken some vacation time after Easter. I'm in my third developmental phase, and I hope for both of us that it will be the last. I have no desire to neither convince you nor explain to you the mystery of the Holy Trinity. I am not interested in giving a talk on dogma. As you know I have a passion to talk about the Word of God, so fear not. I shall not bore you with technical theology. But I do want to tell you about and bear witness to a God who does not dwell in outer space nor hide in the mind of scholastic theologians who love to speak of one in three, three in one, undivided unity. To my mind that language always sounds like algebra which is not an experience but rather a way of thinking.

You can have it either way, I suppose: a God who is something to think about or a God with whom you live day in and day out. I have come to believe that the challenge of this Feast is to bring the right brain and the left brain together, or to touch the mind and the heart lest we go through life with ideas about God and no experience; with thoughts and no memories. Our God is not an idea. Our Trinity, God, three in one, is a God for us. In Jesus, God has become not only "for us" but "with us" and through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, a God "within us." There is some language to wrap your mind around: for us, with us, within us -- -- -- that is language of Trinity out of experience not from a text book. The

dogmas of the church from experience it's not the other way around.

To get it, we simply pick up the Word of God today.

In the Book of Deuteronomy the writer celebrates a God "FOR US" awakening our memories of the moments when God's involvement in human history was clearly evident. The writer moves us into a way of recalling events that have happened to us that only God could have accomplished, and because of it we respond by living in a grateful relationship with that God who is so obviously for us.

To get it, we simply listen to Paul's letter to the Romans today.

Paul celebrates the "for us" character of God and affirms the intimacy of relationship to which we are invited by God. Not slaves or simply creatures, but loved, chosen, and adopted children who can call God, Abba resting in the assurance that God is not only for us, but is also with us.

To get it one last time, listen to Matthew's Gospel today.

A people who know that God is for them and with them, will suddenly begin to understand the truth that God is within them, and if within them, God is within everyone one of them; that every human being is made in God's image which means that Father, Son, and Spirit are experiences not just ideas. We know the Divine as Father comes when we share in God's creative life with creative moments in art and beauty and in bringing life into this world.

We know the Divine as Son when we embrace the unwashed and unwanted, the hungry and the poor, and confront hypocrisy, greed, and violence continuing the work and life of Christ Jesus.

We know the Divine as Spirit with every burst of inspiration and imagination, in wisdom, and in every word and work of love.

The God whose image we reflect does not remain distant, but chooses to be near making this feast ours as well as God's because it is you and me that God has chosen to be involved and invested. It is in you and me that God chooses to dwell. In love we are scooped up into that embrace that has given us life and purpose and meaning. On a hot summer Sunday that truth is enough to celebrate, to remember, and to enjoy.

Audio Available

437

The Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

6/14/2009

Exodus 24: 3-8 + Psalm 116 + Hebrews 9: 11-15 + Mark 14: 12-16, 22-26

Fr. Boyer

On Holy Thursday I was in Shawnee spending a few precious Holy Week hours in prayer at the Monastery. On my return I passed through the center of town to stop and say hello to Father Wolf at St Benedict parish, when one of those electric signs at a local church caught my attention as it flashed the words:

"Holy Thursday!

Holy Communion!

4:30 to 6:00

Come and Go!"

I nearly hit the curb in surprise and wonder at the implication of this message. In fact, I circled back to make sure I had seen correctly. Now I have no intention of becoming the sign police or of suggesting that the practice of that church is any of my business. But the fact that I have not forgotten that sign and that it stands out in my mind on this Feast of The Body and Blood of Christ does tell me that there was something important about that sighting worth recalling. I wondered at the time: "If you come and go, like fast-food or a grabbing a snack, with whom or with what are you in Communion, since it is possible that no one else might be there at the time. Then there was also the implication that Holy Thursday was the only time you could drop in for Holy Communion: very puzzling yet very much to the point of what we are doing here.

Sometimes I don't think we get it right either. We have to stop thinking that Communion is something you get, take, or receive. It is something you enter into: something you become. Because this sacrament is about Covenant, it is not a personal, private matter. God makes Covenants with a people, a nation. The very nature of Covenant is collective, not private. God does not make private deals with each of us. God calls us into the communion of saints, into the saved people of God. There is a trap you can slip into when you start talking about accepting Jesus as your "personal Savior". While each of us must come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, that relationship must take us somewhere and give us a new identity. In other words, it can't stop there: that relationship must awaken us to the reality of the risen Christ, who lives in Communion with us as church, as Christ's Body. It is always about covenant. In the words Jesus spoke at the Supper, he was establishing a new and eternal covenant with us renewed again and again when we gather together to re-member what has been dismembered; and celebrate the promise that he would remain with us forever.

Covenant is the major theological idea of the Old Testament with roots in agreements made in the ancient near east by peoples creating peace through an exchange of promises of shared obligations and respect. The Old Testament is woven together by stories of Covenant always ratified with a sacrifice that was so profound that it symbolized the radical commitment of the partners concluding with a meal during which the offering was consumed. In the action of Christ he made himself both a partner in the new covenant and the offering to be consumed. Eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ is a commitment to be nurtured by the kind and quality of life led by Jesus of Nazareth. Eating and Drinking this offering, this sacrifice makes us one in Christ. It is what establishes us as Church which is why it is not a snack, it is not fast - food, nor can it be private. It is about what we are becoming here, and about

becoming one with all in every age and every place who stand in this tradition.

This feast leads us to reflect upon all the Sacraments of the Church which in some way are all covenants shaping our lives and relationships. In every case, the initiative comes from God and our celebration of the sacraments is our commitment and becomes our response. Marriage is a perfect example. As I said to a couple who stood before this altar yesterday, "It's not about you. You did not choose one another. The first choice was made by God. Celebrate that choice today." People who live in mutual love give each other their whole lives, their whole selves as Jesus gave us his body and blood out of love. It is the sacrament and covenant I have found in Holy Orders. You can't do this half way. It is the covenant we embrace at Baptism, and the covenant that binds the sick to us with the promise of eternal life. It is the covenant promise and gift of forgiveness we celebrate in Reconciliation.

If, as I said last week, the Feast of the Trinity brings us into the mystery of who we are made in the image and likeness of God. Then so does this feast bring us into Communion. This Communion is the source of our holiness and the reason for which we were created: to be in union with God and all creation. Instead of a reluctant minimal, occasional and convenient presence, we ought to be awestruck at what God has begun here and called us to become. If we really understand and believed, what happens here would not be casual or occasional. If we got it, we would never be late, never think of leaving early, and never think of anything more important. It is God who reaches out to us here sometimes while we're headed to the restroom. It is God who looks for us at this table when we stay in bed or find every puny excuse for our absence.

Love without sacrifice is a shallow emotion of sentimentality. Faith without lived commitment is an idea, not a way of life. Communion without the reality of belonging and living in unity is a snack from which we can come and go when we're in the neighborhood. We have to get beyond the matter of bread and wine, and immerse ourselves in the real life of flesh and blood. God's commitment to us was not convenient, occasional, nor simply symbolic. It was total, lasting, and forever. This covenant is about mutual sacrifice and mutual love among those who accept and affirm the agreement and the promise. It cannot be one sided and be true. The reality of this is breath taking, the power of this is beyond imagination, the consequences of this covenant destroys death itself and gives what this world and all its science cannot give: Life everlasting, Joy eternal. Peace forever.

Audio Available

438

Ordinary Time 12

6/21/2009

Job 38:1-11 + Ps 107:23-31 + 2 Cor 5:14-17 + Mk 4:35-41

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

Wisdom 1: 13-15, 2:23-24 + Psalm 30 + 2 Corinthians 8: 7,9, 13-15 + Mark 5: 21-43

Fr. Boyer

Two hopeless situations are met by Jesus today: a girl everyone had given up for dead, and a woman who had exhausted her savings seeking a cure. Last week and next week the church gives us stories of faith tested and challenged. This week, framed on either side by those stories of faith, hope is revealed as the response people of faith have in the face of trial. Look at the two unlikely people Mark puts before us today: a synagogue official and an unclean woman. Synagogue officials do not believe anything about Jesus. They do not ask for anything. They stand back and criticize a man who does work on the Sabbath and touches the unclean. The woman has been sick for so long she has nothing left, not even her dignity. But what they both have is hope which Jesus recognizes as evidence of faith; and with that, he springs into action with an intensity that is unusual.

Jarius is desperate. He risks the disapproval of his peers turning to Jesus. It is his love for his daughter that drives him to take that risk when everything else says: give up. Jesus knows that love and it's power, and he uses the power of God's love knowing that God's love turns death into sleep. Sleepers can be awakened. But that wailing crowd has no faith, and so there is in them no hope. Jesus puts that out, and he takes the hope-filled and loving parents into that room where he reveals not his power, but the power of God's love. For people of faith, for people of hope, and for people of love, something, someone stronger than death has come. The power of God's love is not an exclusive possession of Jesus. He is not the only one who rises from that sleep. A touch and an expression of tender love is all that is required. Yet the proof of this power is still to come in the resurrection of Jesus, so the observers are told not to talk of this event until the full revelation of divine love is given on Easter.

Now lest we think that all this is about Jesus touching people, Mark is quick to have someone else do some touching. Before heading off the home of Jarius, someone touches Jesus and the whole episode begins to raise some question about whether or not "touching" is really about physical touch. I suspect that Jesus is "touched" all right; but not by a hand. I think he is "touched" by her courage in desperation, "touched" by her hope that God can do something doctors have failed to do. The one who does the touching ends up being the one who is touched by God's love. What goes out of Jesus is divine love - that is the only power he has. The two of them know that "it" has happened: that divine love has gone out and divine love has been received.

She has been touched by God, and because of that touch she may now be touched by others. She is clean. She is a woman of faith, and the healing that comes from faith is more than physical. More happens here than simply stopping a flow of blood. A relationship is restored. She can enter back into the community. Without words, Jesus says to her what he says to the little girl as he restores her to her family: "Get up."

"Stand up." "Get up." "Wake up." However you say it, or however you hear it, it is what God is saying to us in Jesus Christ. You are a child of God, and the love of God is always with God's children. Divine Love is not just about restoring people to good health. It is about turning death into sleep and fear into hope. In Jesus Christ, God reaches out to touch us with love, to lift us up, to set us free from death, and to restore us to one another so that we who have been touched may reach out to touch, to heal, to embrace, to kiss, and to hold up each other when ever fear or doubt, death or sickness threaten us.

This is the news Mark gives us today. It is news that will sustain us through this week. It is a story that ends with Jesus saying: "Give her something to eat." There is no better place to remember this story and remember God's Love than gathered in this place where we are given something to eat; and while we shall in a few minutes think that we are reaching out to touch God, do not fail to recognize that it is really God who is touching us every time we gather in this holy place. We cannot really believe this and rush out early or abruptly and continue to live this week as though nothing has happened to us. The people in this story were utterly astounded and the woman fell down before Jesus. The rest of their week must have been something to behold.

Audio Available

440

Ordinary Time 14

7/5/2009

Ezekiel 2: 2-5 + Psalm 123 + 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10 + Mark 6: 1-6

Fr. Boyer

This short little story starts with astonishment and concludes with amazement.

The hometown folks are astonished at what the local boy can do.

He is amazed at their failure see what it's all about.

They think in terms of "ordinary" and "extraordinary".

They think that God only works through special people, learned people, important or official people. The local boy is a carpenter's son. The comment is probably not a compliment. To them he is not eligible. He ought to know his place.

"Who does he think he is?" they wonder.

He is amazed that they remain so ignorant and fail to see what is going on.

He thinks if God can work through him, one of them; God can work through all of them."

Mark explores for us with this simple story the plan of God for us.

He touches on an attitude and confronts a way of thinking that is a serious obstacle to the fulfillment of God's plan and the coming of God's Kingdom.

There is probably not anyone in this church who has not suffered from and had to overcome the burden of other people's expectations and negative comments. A bitter and angry high school teacher once told me that I was a "C" student and ought to quit wasting my time with thoughts of college. It took me a long time to get over that. An unskilled perhaps well meaning coach once told a thirteen year old with size twelve shoes he was too clumsy to play basketball. Fifteen years later with even bigger skies clamped to those size twelve feet he could ski most any mountain in the west and smile all the way down black diamond trails.

Young people look at their parents, shake their heads and think "what do they know?"

And with it, a whole life of wisdom and love is refused and maybe lost for a time. Parents forget that in the simple openness and curiosity of their children there is fresh face on the future and new opportunities for excitement and curiosity. All of us live with limitations we place on each other, and those boxes into which we force others do not so much restrain the other as stifle the work of God who continues to work and be revealed in people just like us.

I stand here week after week and share with you a lifetime of study, prayer, and reflection on the Word of God knowing that the most Spirit-packed words can fall lifeless to the earth because it is up to believers to create and bring into the present the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of Justice, Love, and Peace. I never assume that it is going to happen because I talk about it. I believe that what is spoken here is less than half the sermon. What you do is the greater half and far more. In an atmosphere that welcomes the Word, the poorest effort can ignite a great flame. I believe that this place would packed wall to wall with people singing the praise of God and bringing their gifts for the mission of the church if the whole sermon was preached and lived. It isn't up to me to bring people to Christ, to communion and celebrate the forgiveness of sins. It is up to you; and that starts when all of us begin to recognize and realize what it is we are all called to become.

The people of Nazareth couldn't believe that they were capable of great signs and wonders, capable of revealing the presence of and doing the work of God. Their problem with Jesus was really a problem with themselves. They had been put down by others who said that "nothing good come from Nazareth". Living with limitations and expectations that they were inferior, incompetent, and insignificant led to their loss of Jesus who refused to think that of himself, not because he thought he was God; but because he knew he was called and chosen.

So are we all called and chosen, blessed, enlightened, empowered by God to do great things in the name of the Lord. The more that truth dawns upon us and awakens us to the new day that has begun in Jesus Christ, the nearer will be the Kingdom of God not because of a carpenter's son in a tiny insignificant town in the corner of the Roman Empire; but because that carpenter's son awakened in us the power of the Spirit, the Love of God, and a passionate desire to live together in Joy. What an amazing and astonishing day that will be. When that happens, come early because there will not be room in here - the crowd will be greater than in that stadium on Jenkins Street not because there is a good sermon or good music, but because there are good people living in the Kingdom of God.

Audio Available

441

Ordinary Time 15

7/12/2009

Amos 7: 12-15 + Psalm 85 + Ephesians + Mark 6: 7-13

Fr. Boyer

Last week the challenge of rising above the expectations and limitations of others was put before us by Mark and Paul and an old Testament Prophet. The question of how could a carpenter from Nazareth be anything more than a carpenter from Nazareth was raised and resolved. This week we move a step further. We hear a shouting match between Amaziah a priest of the royal shrine at Bethel in the northern Kingdom as he is throwing Amos a prophet from the southern kingdom out of the country. He tells him to shut up and go home and get a job. Amos responds by simply saying that he is no royal prophet under the employ of the king, but just a shepherd and farmer called by God and free to tell it like it is. It is a tough and personal affront to the pompous royal prophet but a powerful argument for his case by Amos; because Amos is free to tell the truth. Amaziah had better watch what he says if he wants to keep his job and his life.

Now which of these two is really called, and which one of them has credibility:

the professional whose future depends upon royal approval,

or the farmer who is free to speak what he sees, believes, and trusts?

There is the professional with the credentials and authority

and the farmer with courage and faith.

Then comes the Gospel which up until this time has given us an impression of the disciples that is not particularly flattering. Time after time they fail to get the point of what Jesus is about. Their faith is faltering at best, and they never seem to be focused on the meaning of things that are happening all around them. Now Jesus decides to send this stumbling group out on mission.

There is only one reason to proclaim this Gospel today and retell the story of Amos.

It is not to sit back and admire the faith and the courage of the twelve. Nor is it to think about brave volunteer missionaries who have taken faith in Jesus Christ and proclaimed the Kingdom all over this earth. This is about us. Pay attention to the details: twelve were sent out -- it's an important number that says something in Biblical symbols -- it means everyone was sent: all twelve participate in the mission to heal and restore this life. The only reason to proclaim this Gospel today is to reassess our own mission and remind ourselves of what we are about and what we are doing here. There cannot be anyone in here who does not have a mission and a call from Christ. It just comes with Baptism, and it is accepted if you're going to take communion in here.

We Catholics see ourselves as prophetic people. Paul writes about that in Ephesians today. Everyone of us has been given the ability to grasp and appreciate and express the plan the Father has for human life. It's never been a secret. Jesus has revealed the truth. The prophet and prophetic people show the world the values and attitudes that shape a life lived in accord with the mind of God; but the prophet does not "go with the flow" when the flow is contrary to the mind of God. There are times when the prophet takes a stand and calls into question attitudes and values that do not advance a Kingdom of Justice and Peace. There are some who think the church should stay out of politics, and it should when the politics are its own. But separation of church and state does not separate the church from society. The prophet is not quiet in a country where the rate of child poverty is 21%: the highest in the 17 economically advanced countries. We have more people in prison per capita for non violent crimes than any country

in the world and too many are women. We are in total denial over the collapse of health care while the growing inequality in the distribution of wealth denies the most fundamental principals of justice. This not politics. It is morality. We live in a society that scoffs at international law and justifies torture with the comment: "It works." Prophets cannot be still. The society in which we live has the biggest arsenal and a standing army that is invincible with no will nor way to feed and house the growing number of poor and helpless people who call this church for help day in and day out. The prophet keeps saying: "Something is wrong." The prophet does not say: "You are bad." The prophet simply asks: "Is there a better way?"

Prophets formed by Jesus have nothing to lose because they take nothing with them. Prophets formed by Jesus do not polarize and divide people into conservatives and liberals. The whole and single work of a prophet is to unite. Missionary journeys are never solitary adventures. They do not go out with a bag of tricks and book of arguments to prove their view point. They go out to "share the gospel". The verb share implies an exchange, a give and take, the acceptance of an other because they understand that God's power works through mutuality. This is why they must stay in one home to deepen relationships, listen, and grow.

There is something profound here being said about our faith and our responsibility for it. We are not empowered to condemn or demonize other people. We are called to share the news that forgiveness heals, that justice unites, that violence destroys, that life is a gift from God and through life, all and every life, God remains present to us. The destruction of any life destroys God's presence. We do not have to go far to share what has been entrusted to us: to work, to the store, to the bank or just next door. Kindness and respect, patience and a willingness to listen, a desire to understand and be understood, openness and a hunger for the truth are all qualities of the prophets Jesus sends on mission. Sustained by these insights and instructions, disciples called, chosen, and commissioned by Jesus will be able to continue what he has begun until he comes again.

Audio Available

442

Ordinary Time 16

7/19/2009

Jeremiah 23: 1-6 + Psalm 23 + Ephesians 2: 13-18 + Mark 6: 30-34

Fr. Boyer

Jesus proposes three things to disciples who get tired, who get weary, and live too fast.

"Come away to a deserted place." he says.

"Rest"

"Eat."

And so he get the in a boat to "cross over."

Let's go deeper into these invitations than a shallow imagination of a leisurely picnic in an out of the way place after a boat ride.

I believe there are some powerful symbols here suggesting something much deeper.

The suggestion of "crossing over" might very well mean crossing over to a new way of thinking - a change of mind rather than a change of scenery. I believe that Jesus is inviting his disciples to experience compassion.

It is an experience that requires a crossing over, a shift from attention and awareness of difference to sameness. What Jesus invites his disciples is to cease noticing differences around them: differences between people and between themselves and take up a new way of thinking about sameness. Only when that happens is compassion possible. The recognition of sameness is the wellspring of compassion.

Once we cross over and recognize our sameness, our actions begin to come from a space of communion. Compassion is not an achievement but the recognition of the deeper truth of solidarity. The mission of faithful people is always about unity as I suggested last week. The prophet, the apostle, the disciple does not divide, separate, polarize and separate. It is healing mission that we are given, and so compassion is indispensable; but to be authentic, it springs from a recognition of our solidarity; the truth that we are all alike once we probe the depth of the human heart.

The consciousness of this truth is a restful place from which actions flow easily, without pressure and pushing, happening more by itself. And so, the invitation to rest is extended to apostolic people. But this "rest" does not mean inactivity. It is more like the Sabbath rest, an invitation to be sustained by the goodness of Creation. It does not mean more time to sleep or play with less work. It means acting in harmony with creation and the Spirit of God. It means not thinking we have to do it all; but realizing that what we do if it is in accord with God's will is not hard and is always successful. It simply means working with God rather than working alone.

Finally, there is also that invitation to come to a deserted place and "eat." Now think for a minute! A deserted place is not going to have food. If it's literally a deserted place, there will be nothing there. No food is found in a deserted place. This is symbolic language for simply learning to be fed by God. It is what happened to the Israelites in their deserted place. They learned be fed by God who never failed to give them their daily bread. It was the experience of Jesus in the desert after his baptism by John. He learned to be fed by God. Coming away to that place is means returning to the Source - it means being nurtured by God. In the next couple of weeks, we are going to hear a lot about food and ponder together how it is the God feeds us and satisfies our hungers.

For now, in the middle of summer - that season we thought would give us a break, some rest, and some leisure. It looks to me like we are all just as busy as always, falling further behind and still hungry. For what other reason would we all eat so much and complain about it? Jesus speaks to us all today: not to a select few. As a people, as a church, we are the shepherds, and the only way to imitate the Good Shepherd will be to learn compassion, to look at each other with an understanding that comes from knowing ourselves which is really the secret to knowing another. "Cross over" suggests Jesus. Look at what we have in common, not what makes us different. Work with God. It will require half as much effort, and expect God to provide what we need by living in harmony with God's will.

I believe that these are things he began to teach them, and much more besides.

Audio Available

443

Ordinary Time 17

7/26/2009

2 Kings 4: 42-44 + Psalm 145 + Ephesians 4: 1-6 + John 6: 1-15

Fr. Boyer

Who is the center of this story? I have always wondered about that when reflecting upon it.

Is it Philip with his comment about the obvious?

Is it Jesus with his test of their trust?

or is it that boy who may have been clever and industrious enough to follow the crowd with his basket knowing that his chance to profit from their hunger would send him home with a pocket full of cash.

I have wondered what it might have been like for him to see the crowd grow so large and so hungry; what it might have been like to have those apostles walk up to him and say, "The master needs this."

In any case, without that boy there would have been no story to tell,

so don't be too quick to sit back and be amazed at what Jesus did.

This Gospel and the next one a week from now speak about food.

For John writing this Gospel, there are two kinds of food: physical and spiritual.

The people are hungry, but they can't seem to see the food that is right in front of them.

The answer to their hunger is right there: the one who next week says: "I am the bread of Life."

Physical hunger is always conscious of scarcity.

Spiritual hunger is always conscious of abundance.

Jesus tests those disciples to see if they are catching on to this,

and so the story unfolds for the next five weeks in our churches as we ponder John chapter five.

I urge you to read the whole chapter in one sitting

and not be satisfied with the little sections we shall be proclaiming.

The news of this Gospel lies not just in what Jesus is, but in what we become as we grow more like him.

And so there is the boy with his basket standing before Philip and Andrew

surrounded by physical hunger and invited by Jesus to give up or offer up his few loaves and fish when he knows what they know.

It isn't enough.

It is the moment when physical hunger and spiritual hunger meet.

When they do, there is enough for all.

A small boy's willingness to make an offering to God, letting his gift be redirected to the people, trusting that in God's hands there will be enough for all changes everything.

Now instead of worry and concern about scarcity,

there is gratitude for the abundance of God's gift.

All the resources needed for this world are here with us.

We are simply too concerned about the scarcity and short on gratitude for the abundance.

We always think there is not enough,

and the only reason to think that way is that we think God has not given enough.

Jesus will not give in to that thinking.

An extra ordinary response to divine abundance holds the ability to satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Then almost as an aside, Jesus calls their attention to the left-over food with a challenge about wastefulness

since we know that the scraps of our tables and unsold market food every day would feed nations. But there is more here than this directive about gathering scraps.

Notice carefully the details John provides in his unique version of this event.

Here, Jesus alone delivers the food.

The disciples gather up what is left lest it perish.

This commission to the disciples is more than a caution about food waste.

It is not just about food. Nothing is to perish and no one is to perish.

The disciples are sent to gather everyone lest someone perish.

Something is being said here about who is to share in the abundance of the Kingdom and be fed by Jesus.

They are sent to bring everyone to the source of life - the bread of life - the one takes what we have and gives what we need.

So, on a summer Sunday, Andrew and Philip stand before us to suggest what we shall become.

A little boy stands before us to suggest what is asked of us.

Audio Available

444

Ordinary Time 19

8/9/2009

Kings 19: 4-8 + Psalm 34 + Ephesians 4: 30-5:2 + John 6: 41-51

Fr. Boyer

I had to remind myself while praying and working my way into this homily that chapter six of John's Gospel began with the feeding of a multitude. We have to keep that in mind when we pick up loose verses like the ten today.

The word is out! Free meals! Come and get it.

This crowd seeks Jesus for the wrong reasons,

and that becomes more obvious as the chapter moves along.

The crowd is interested in material things: food, signs, and wonders.

They will not go beyond the sign and how it benefits them.

They will not consider what the sign means, what it asks of them, nor will they recognize the one who provides the sign.

They will not ask that question.

They want one thing and one thing only, their entertainment and free food so to speak. When the free food demands something of them (belief) they start to murmur.

But this Gospel proclaimed today in this place is not about "them."

It speaks to any and all who are here or who come to Jesus for the wrong reasons.

This Gospel speaks to anyone absent or thinking about leaving because they do not get anything out of it.

It speaks to anyone whose relationship with God depends upon getting something they want or need.

"Do you believe because you see signs and wonders?" Jesus asks?

"Do you believe because your prayers are answered;

because you get what you want?

because you feel satisfied have a good time and are comforted?

This Gospel suggests something else,

and those people who heard him became uncomfortable and backed away.

People of faith are wondering what it is God asks of them,

not what it is God can do for them.

People of faith are not gathered around Jesus to get what they can.

They are drawn together to bear one another's burdens, to stand in communion,

to lift up the cross, and live in the presence of God whose plan for this world is not a nation of consumers, obese from gluttony, exploiting the weakest and most vulnerable, and hiding in gated communities from the poor whose very poverty has often supported their luxury.

God sees all of this and says: "Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, and they died."

The operative word in Chapter Six is "flesh."

We have to dwell on that and get it right.

Jesus is not talking about meat. That is not the "flesh" he promises.

This "flesh for the life of the world" is presence - as real as flesh and blood.

It's about "incarnation" --- hear that syllable "carne" in the bigger word?

Any fourth grade student of Spanish knows that Latin word for flesh-meat: carne. It expresses the real presence, the real in-dwelling of God in this world. This is the most profound, literal and real revelation of God's presence in this world: in the flesh: not spiritual, nor symbolic. REAL.

In this part of John's Gospel and next week we shall reflect upon the very roots and deepest meaning of the Eucharist. Eating this bread that is his flesh and drinking this cup of salvation is an entry into the presence of God who in this sacrament becomes a living presence within us. This changes the way we think of and see our selves and the way we look into the face of the others who commune in the presence of God with us.

Last week, Jesus speaks to them about ultimate things, and they ask silly questions. He speaks of eternal life, and they want a sign, and then ask for bread. This week, he gives them bread and calls it "flesh" and they back away murmuring. They cannot see what is right in front of them because they are so bogged down in a literal, the superficial, and materialistic reality.

How shall it be for us? More entertainment and free food?
Or, shall we enter into this revelation
to discover that giving flesh for the life of the world
has something to do with sacrifice, service, and laying down one's life for another.
It has something to do with being broken, poured out, and shared.
It is God who proposes that this is the only way to eternal life.
"Believe it and live." he will say to us next week.
In the meantime we probably ought to figure out what we're doing here;
why we have come; and what we are going to become because of it.
Audio Available

445

Ordinary Time 20

8/16/2009

Proverbs 9: 1-6 + Psalm 34 + Ephesians 5: 15-20 + John 6: 51-58

Fr. Boyer

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they ask.

Always the wrong questions!

The issue is not "how".

What matters is "why" and what happens because of it.

It has always seemed to me that the 'How' question leads to discussions of transubstantiation which is all very fine if you think with the mind of a scholastic and are motivated such arguments, distinctions, and language.

But when it's all neatly explained in that theological techno language, the real question still remains: "Why?"

If you fail to get to that question, it does no good to understand how.

If you do not arrive a moment faith,

all the language of theology is just an intellectual exercise.

First comes belief in the one who gives, then comes belief in the gift.

That is the progress of thought in this chapter of John's Gospel.

Who is it that gives, and then what is given.

You cannot understand and believe in the gift

until you understand and believe in the giver.

The invitation extended here,

and the gift that is given is a relationship of intimate and personal dimension.

Yet a world like ours that gets less personal every day finds this difficult to understand.

Texting and email may be instant, but they do not provide communication.

They only provide messages and information that is often misinterpreted.

There is no communion between people in the this kind of world:

no living presence, no sound of voice with inflection and tenderness,

no eyes to see, no hands to hold and touch.

The price of this instant connection is personal presence,

and without that there is no real human relationship, only a technical connection.

It is no wonder that statistics reveal that 50% of Catholics

do not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

They speak in terms of memorial and symbol, remembrance, and sign

avoiding the reality of this moment.

What we do here is not about the Last Supper.

It is about this supper.

It is not about the historical Jesus whom we fondly remember.

It is about the risen Christ who is present today in our midst.

The evidence of this failure to believe is clear every week as a large proportion of people in this assembly head out the door once they have received communion

with no thought nor witness to belief in what has just happened in this place.

If they did, they would fall to their knees

and complain that the thanksgiving time is too short.

They may have received communion,
but they have not entered into the relationship to which they are invited.

Intimacy is the gift, and intimacy often makes us uncomfortable and vulnerable,
A God who hungers for us invites us to feed on the divine presence.

The relationship into which we are invited according to John's Gospel
is the same relationship Jesus experienced and lived.

"Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father,
so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me."

It is not a relationship for some time in the future.

It is a relationship that begins as soon as we eat his flesh and drink his blood.

It is an offer and invitation that is so profound that once understood makes us hesitate not with doubt,
but with wonder because it is almost too good to be true.

There is no answer to the question "how" can this man give us his flesh to eat.

What simply matters is who provides his flesh and blood

and why we would be invited to enter into the depth of this one who lives forever
and would have us live through, with, and in him.

When you say, "Amen" you accept the gift the Father gives to His Son, Jesus Christ and if like His Son, we
remain obedient and seek the Father's will,

death will have no power over us for we will already have begun to live forever.

Audio Available

446

Ordinary Time 21

8/23/2009

Joshua 24: 1-2,15-17,18 + Psalm 34 + Ephesians 5: 21-32 + John 6: 60-69

Fr. Boyer

It is easier to leave things alone than to make changes even when the way things are is not right, easy, or productive. That is a fact of human behavior. Addicts of every kind know that truth. They simply stay in their old ways because it's too hard to do or be anything different.

It is easier to leave than to stay when a relationship gets demanding, the needs of someone else conflict with our own comfort and satisfaction, or it just gets harder to be faithful, keep a promise, or do the right the thing. This fact of human behavior accounts for a lot of divorce, fragmented churches, civic failure, and unfulfilled dreams.

In these closing verses of John's sixth chapter, there is suddenly an awakening that Jesus is talking about more than bread, and that the intimacy to which he has invited his followers and the relationship he extends to them will do more than make them feel good and be satisfied. It is beginning to be clear that something is going to happen to those who eat this bread, that in becoming his flesh and blood, they will become the giver not the receiver. If he is bread, those who eat that bread will themselves be bread. If he is broken, they too will have to be broken. They will not simply be hearers of God's word, but doers of God's word. No wonder they began to murmur. It would be easier to leave things alone; or as John puts it, it is just easier to go back to their former way of life.

What troubles them is not eating flesh. It is the reality that eating that flesh will awaken within them life; but not a life for this world. In other words, the Spirit will take possession of them. They will become spiritual beings first and foremost, and the human/earthly part of them will be secondary and passing. They will live in this world but not be of this world. In the language of this Gospel, Jesus speaks of flesh over and against the spirit. He insists that the flesh, which here refers to the human way of being in the world, cannot give life. That is the difference between the old desert manna and the bread he will give. One nourishes the body which will die. The other nourishes the Spirit which will live.

Living by the spirit rather than living by the flesh is a difficult choice for people who do not believe in this one who has come down from heaven and will go back to heaven. It is difficult because he is suggesting that they have heavenly origins and a heavenly destiny, and therefore how they live in this world and how they relate to one another will be influenced, shaped and sustained by that knowledge and that faith.

A decision to believe in Jesus Christ determines our identity like the people of the Old Testament reading, and it determines whether or not we are spiritual or just a combination of water and various chemicals here today and gone tomorrow. Peter and his friends had by this time come to trust and believe. They saw the choice and understood that nothing in this world gives life, that nothing in this world could lead them to and fulfill the promise that was within them and for which they were created.

The choices we make in this life always reveal our deepest values and our inner motives from the company we keep to the cereal we eat. Now at the end of the sixth chapter, John puts before us the choice that Jesus offers: stay where you are and do nothing except prepare to die or enter into communion with Christ and prepare to live not in the future, but right now. Live as a citizen of the

Kingdom of heaven, live as one who feeds the hungry, touches the sick, listens and forgives, bears a burden rather than a grudge, and lives by the Spirit rather than the flesh of this world.

Peter and his friends stayed but no longer in the world of the flesh. Others left to return to their former ways in this world unmoved, untouched, by the Spirit that gives life. John tells us why Peter and his friends stayed: because they had come to believe and know. Coming to believe and know is the very process of a spiritual life or the life of a true disciple. It is a process that begins with trusting enough and ends with understanding enough.

(5:30 pm)So, women of faith, awakening your life in the Spirit will lead you into a deeper and more profound life giving union with Christ and God. You have come here for this conference trusting enough and hopefully you leave here understanding enough: trusting the faith you treasure and the church in which you find hope; and better understanding what you have been called to become by God's will and God's plan. No choice is ever made once and for all. Someone asked me not long ago when I decided to be a priest. I said: "This morning when I got up." I do it every day. It is no different for you. Your choice to live the sacramental covenant of marriage is made again and again. Your choice to live the life of a faithful Catholic is made over and over again, not just at your baptism. Your faith is confirmed by your every choice. Decide every day, not just today whom you will serve. In so doing you will always be Women of Faith.

(11:00 am)So, those of you who come here as candidates for Confirmation: awaken your life in the Spirit. It will lead you into deeper and a more profound and life giving union with Christ and God. You have come in formation trusting and hopefully when I present you to the Archbishop you will have understanding enough. Trusting the faith you treasure and the church in which you find hope. Understand what you have been called to become by God's will and God's plan. Ask every day what God wants you to become with your life. It is the only way to find fulfillment and lasting Joy.
Audio Available

447

Ordinary Time 22

8/30/2009

Deuteronomy 4: 1-2,6-8 + Psalm 15 + James 1: 17-18,21-22,27 + Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Fr. Boyer

As I was sitting with this Gospel, I began to remember an old saying my father used to use on me and my sister:

"Sticks and Stone will break your bones, but words can never hurt you."

You've heard it before?

Over the past few years, my sister and I have been collecting some of the sayings our parents used on us. This one is going to be the cause of a serious conversation when we meet again in heaven - provided their plans for my future are fulfilled.

What in the world was my dad thinking?

Whoever made up that old saying must have been a deaf-mute!

Words hurt.

They hurt a lot longer than sticks and stones, at least that's my experience.

Yet words are important.

The Jewish people often referred to the Ten Commandments as the "Ten Words." Insisting that those words have power, the power to save or the power to justify.

This gets us to the heart of this dispute with Jesus. He is suggesting something else.

He challenges the idea that just keeping the rules, minding the commandments is not enough.

In fact, that behavior can sometimes lead to evil, wrong doing, and take one far away from God.

Jesus contrasts what is inside of us and what is outside.

He suggests that what is within us matters first and foremost, and paying attention to that - perhaps we could call it, that inner voice is motive for and the source of goodness and righteousness.

There are times when strict adherence to the law can produce the opposite of what is intended.

Rather than enhance human life and direct us to God, rigid conformity can restrict life and result in smug self-satisfaction.

In his example of life, he makes exceptions when the good of others seems to call for exceptions.

What we enter into with this passage from Mark's Gospel is probably a look at the early church and an inner-Jewish dispute.

The Pharisees were primarily a lay group dedicated to strict observance of the Temple regulations for purity in their daily lives as a sign that every aspect of life could be holy.

What we might suspect is that the followers of Christ were beginning to struggle among themselves over how to keep the law and yet be faithful to the master's vision of the family of God hospitable to all, welcoming the increasing number of Gentiles and Greeks who were not "clean."

In this Gospel Jesus speaks not to the Pharisees and scribes, but to his disciples, warning them of those evils that can pollute the human heart and destroy relationships. It strikes me that this struggle is always

with us. We face it as a nation when we struggle over the law and the immigrants - over whether or not the demands of charity that are rooted in our hearts might influence the imposition of the law and how we might view the law when we see it tear families apart with children left helpless and homeless while we enforce the law. This is just the most obvious example of what this Gospel suggests we might need to consider on an even larger scale.

A lot of human suffering and destruction goes on in every age as people hide behind rules and regulations. Jesus is concerned about moral defilement and how it comes into the world. He shows us that it happens in the exact opposite way of ritual impurity. Defilement begins and develops in the human heart in the cultivation of evil thoughts, intentions, and imaginings.

We all work from the inside out, not the other way around. If our minds are full of fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, jealousy, deceit, slander and pride, these drive our actions. Hiding behind the facade of keeping all the rules does not build a kingdom of love and peace. The Pharisees and scribes are obsessed with the ritual defilement and the external world. Jesus is attentive on the internal world and the moral havoc it releases. He insists that we pay attention to and focus on what drives moral behavior.

There is always more going on within us than we care to admit. Without attending to the inner voice and the inner self, the outer easily turns into an act into hypocrisy. This is the beginning of shallow trivial lives concerned about how things look more than with how things really are. Jesus lives out of his heart and proposes that those who would follow him should confront any inability to hold together the inner love of God and neighbor and the outer ways that love should be embodied.

Audio Available

448

Ordinary Time 24

9/13/2009

Isaiah 50: 4-9 + Psalm 116 + James 2: 14-18 + Mark 8: 27-35

Fr. Boyer

Peter gets the word right: "Christ" (the anointed one), but not the idea behind it.

Then as if that isn't enough, the student begins to lecture the teacher!

Peter is not happy with Jesus.

Peter has a better idea about what it means to be the "Son of Man."

Jesus silences the disciples for fear they will spread misunderstanding rather than Good News. It is why he silenced talk of "Messiah" because it was an ideology filled with too many meanings and expectations.

Once the silence is asked, an important movement takes place that we can easily pass over.....it says: "He turned around."

This is more than a physical twist. It tells us that he is moving in a different direction and deeper level of consciousness and meaning.

The "Son of Man" is one who lives in solidarity with God and others."

That solidarity with both God and others is the point.

This is Jesus, and it must be the true name of all who follow him.

It is the new humanity Jesus initiates.

The problem these disciples have is still a problem.

Like Peter and his companions, we are stuck in our ways of thinking and our fantasies.

We are stuck in our prayers, our expectations, and our way of life, even spiritually.

Our images of God are often images of our selves. Idolatry is no sin of the past.

We are still making our gods. Sometimes they are us.

We have expectations of how God ought to behave.

We are little people always thinking bigger.

If we have rank and power, it is never enough.

If we have money, we always need more.

If we are important, we are never important enough.

We are little people with big ideas, and talk and dreams of a Messiah feed this fantasy.

When the Messiah comes, he will wipe away every tear, seat people at table and feed them. He will heal every sickness, love and reward each human person.

He will do everything we do not do our selves? And why is that?

Why do we not dry the tears of another?

Why do we not feed the hungry and bring them to this table of plenty?

Because. Because we do not understand what it means to be "Son of Man".

As Mark's Gospel unfolds, it looks as though God is going to fix everything, and everyone comes running to get in on the action. Satan is run off, crowds are fed, the sick are healed - everyone dreams and hopes are going to be satisfied.

They proclaimed his power and greatness,

but he kept talking and insisting that they listen.

Instead of going the way they proposed a Messiah should go,
Jesus turned on them.
He was a profound disappointment, and to many, he still is.
He lives a life of trust in God and service of others.
He does not harm other to secure his own life.
Saving himself is the last thing on his mind.
And so those disciples of this master become what he is.
Instead of wanting to become great, we becomes small.
Instead of wanting to lord it over others we grow in service.
So, "one who lives in solidarity with God and others" (Son of Man)
bears burdens not grudges,
is always his brothers keeper,
sees all things of this world as gifts to be shared,
gives forgiveness before expecting it,
and always has enough to give more to others.

To those who live in this world alone, this way of thinking is offensive.
They will not look the other way. They will make us suffer. Many will be ashamed of us, take advantage
of us, and ridicule us. This is the cross we must take up.
Like Jesus, we will have to turn - turn away and turn toward.
It is conversion to which we are called. It is a way of life, a state in life, a description of the Christian's
life: conversion.
We must clear up in our minds what discipleship is all about.
It is not about saving our lives, justifying our thinking, opinions, or ideas.
It is not about our chronic concern to enhance our lives and secure ourselves.
Our minds must be on the things of God, not on our little puny lives.
Audio Available

449

Ordinary Time 25

9/20/2009

Wis 2:12-20 + Ps 54:3-8 + Jas 3:16-4:3 + Mk 9:30-37

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

450

Ordinary Time 26

9/27/2009

Numbers 11: 25-29 + Psalm 19 + James 5: 1-6 + Mark 9: 38-43, 45, 46-48

Fr. Boyer

One of the most sure manifestations of sin in our times
is the human delusion that someone else is the problem. Not me.
Creating scapegoats and victims is the way we excuse ourselves from every problem.
It's a small and tiny step to demonize the ones we blame,
and that behavior is a set-up for violence
whether it be violent words or violent action.
It's all of course about power and control.
We think we have to have it, and there is never enough.
There is something in us that makes us either
want to play the victim or make a victim.
Once we start feeling sorry for our self, i.e. "playing the victim";
we find someone else to blame or attack
and that takes away our shame, guilt, anxiety or fear.
But only for a little while, because it isn't real and never works for long.
The consequence however is alienation, polarization, and exclusion.

We get a look into that sort of thing with today's Gospel and Old Testament reading.
The disciples in earlier verses have been unable to cast out a demon.
It is important to remember that incident which occurred prior to this one.
They are down on themselves, disappointed, discouraged,
and frustrated that they could not accomplish what they expected and wanted.
Then someone else comes along,
someone different from them, perhaps less respected
and they accomplish what the apostles could not!
Suddenly the victim of failure makes another victim.

Of course, never mind, give no thought to,
or even consider the person who has been relieved of a great burden and set free:
the one who has been healed.
It is as though that person does not matter
as long the winners and losers get established in the power struggle.
In the meantime, the work of the Kingdom is at a standstill,
so Jesus insists that it makes no difference who does the work as long as it gets done.

For disciples of Jesus then, a change is in order.
Instead of thinking about themselves
with relentless competition and the constant need to be the best,
the greatest, or number one,
what matters is the little ones;
and as far as Jesus is concerned it makes no difference who cares for them
as long as they get cared for.

When Jesus talks about self-mutilation
it is of course not something literal that he expects -- at least not quite.
What he does expect is that we root out of ourselves, cut off and cast away
something that we think is just as important or as dear to us as a hand or a foot.
He expects his disciples to give up their quest for power,
their exalted ideas about being the best or being important,
and all ideas about how things should be done and who should do them.

"Do it my way" is a constant recurring theme with people of power,
and rather than have it get done another way,
they would rather not have something happen at all.
That sort of thinking, and that sort of behavior is the end of the Kingdom of God.
Jesus would have disciples always "thinking out of the box" so to speak;
always ready and willing to embrace new ways
and new partners in the work of the Kingdom.
For the truth is, the Spirit of God blows where it will and blows upon everyone.
As a religion, we are finished with the triumphant idea
that only Catholics can be saved even though some others may doubt that about us.
As individuals though, we may yet have to get a little more creative and Spirit filled
to see the hand of God working through people who are not like us
or see the face of God in people who do not look like us, sound like us, and act like us.

Moses got it right:
"Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets.
Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit upon them all."
We pray at this Eucharist today that we get it right.
Audio Available

451

Ordinary Time 27

10/4/2009

Gn 2:18-24 + Ps 128:1-6 + Heb 2:9-11 + Mk 10:2-16

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

452

Ordinary Time 27

10/4/2009

Genesis 2: 18-24 + Psalm 128 + Hebrews 2: 9-11 + Mark: 10: 2-16

Fr. Boyer

The Gospel, every Gospel is about the kingdom of God.

It is always an announcement that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Every story, every saying, every parable is about the kingdom of God;

and one of the most frequently used descriptions of the Kingdom of God is a wedding feast. So when this incident occurs and this discussion follows we must think about the Kingdom of God. This is not about divorce.

"What God has joined together, no one may divide." This is gospel talk - so, it's about the Kingdom of God, and the signal to remind us of that is the context in which it is placed: a discussion about marriage. A favorite image of the Kingdom.

If you do not go further and deeper into these words and what they reveal about God's plan, you will be stuck where some Pharisees are stuck.

Jesus has come to restore the original condition of life between us and God.

He has come to restore, reestablish that life we first had by God's plan.

It was a life of unity - oneness between man and woman, and oneness with God.

The effect of sin has been to destroy that unity.

As Genesis tells it, the first consequence of sin

was for Adam and Eve to recognize that they were different, and then they hid.

The oneness, the wholeness, the unity of creation has been ruined.

When Jesus says: "What God has joined together, no one may divide", why do we think he is only talking about marriage?

Is the unity of husband and wife the only thing God has joined together?

What about the unity between a mother and her child?

What about the unity between a brother and a sister?

....between families

....within the human family?

What about the unity, the harmony and oneness between human life and this earth itself?

I was listening to a commentator on the TV the other night talking about red states and blue states - sensing as we all do the terrible division and hostility between those political ideologies, and I wondered, what ever happened to the "United States"?

Now they are only blue or red?

The work and mission of Jesus Christ was one continuous ministry of healing what was divided, reuniting what was separated, healing what was broken.

Think of the miracles - they are always about some reunion or restoration.

He raises a little girl and gives her back to her father.

He raises a centurion's son and restores that family unity.

He tells about a broken family and a runaway son,

describing a father waiting to have all his sons come in the house together.

He heals lepers so that they can be restored to their place in the community.

On and on it goes, one continuous effort, one manifestation of God's will ---- that all would be one and nothing be divided.

So, what has God joined together?

Much more than a man and a woman.

We can't stop there with this expression of God's wish and will for us all.

Friendships broken cannot remain so.

Children who will not speak to brothers and sisters or to their parents cannot remain so apart and hostile.

Nations and races cannot be at odds. Racism has no place in God's plan.

Why? Because God joined us together at the beginning, and that paradise, that plan, that love of God will be restored, or the work of Jesus will be in vain.

When Jesus calls those children to himself, those apostles are still doing what they did last week when they wanted to exclude someone who had cast out a demon they had failed to cast out. They thought it was all about them, that they were somehow privileged and therefore could exclude someone who was different.

Jesus objects.

Today he rebukes even more strongly their effort to exclude; this time it is children.

It is of course, not because they are tiny, vulnerable, or weak.

It is, according to that culture, that they produce nothing,

and like children, they are totally dependent upon God making no pretense that they are special, unique, or self-sufficient.

The very inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God and the very inclusive behavior of Jesus Christ confronts attitudes of division, privilege, brokenness, and disunity.

There will be no Kingdom of God, while there is disunity of any kind.

That Kingdom will come no closer as long as we insist on being separate, different, or special expecting privilege or power or positions of influence over others.

In the final day of his life with us, Jesus expressed in his prayer the Father's will:

"That they may all be one as we, Father, are one."

What God has joined together must not be divided.

At some point we have to open our minds and hearts and begin to wonder at all God has joined together, and wonder how we can put it back together again.

When we do, the Kingdom of God will be at hand.

No Audio Available

453

Ordinary Time 28

10/11/2009

Wis 7:7-11 + Ps 90:12-17 + Heb 4:12-13 + Mk 10:17-30

Fr. Dougherty

When ever we face tragedy or a serious crisis in our lives, we are called upon to redefine who we are and what we are about.

Last month we remembered again the anniversary of what will always be known as 9/11, when we as a nation were forced to redefine ourselves and our national identity.

I was present last week at a funeral of a 20 year old who committed suicide and that family had to struggle to redefine family life and their commitment to one another as parents, as family.

Serious failures or tragic mistakes always call us to redefine who we are and what we are about, because we simply cannot let ourselves be defined by what we have done wrong or what has tragically happened to us.

There is no doubt that we as Catholics are in a great crisis in our church and that we are being called upon to refine ourselves as a church and as members of the Body of Christ.

That was what was going on in the lives of the people of Mark's community of faith, when the gospel of Mark was put into a written form in about the year 70AD. All that had given them identity as people of God and of the promise, as members of the Jewish community, was in crisis: the temple has been destroyed by the Romans; the Jewish leadership was in crisis; as followers of Jesus, they were being kicked out of the Jewish church; many were facing persecutions for their faith; the promise of the immediate coming of Jesus in glory, as the messiah, was not so immediate as they had thought or hoped. And so in their crisis, they had to remember the story of Jesus, and of his teachings, and of his promise of the fulfillment of God's kingdom. They were forced to redefine who Jesus was and who they were.

And so Mark's community goes back to their memory of Jesus, when Jesus asked them who do people say that "I am"?; who do you say that "I am"? That was 4 Sundays ago. Since then, we have gathered on weekends to be challenged to remember the story of Jesus, how he told us that "the Son of man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, chief priest and the scribes and then be killed". You can't be in any greater crisis in life than that, and yet that is what he said, and that as followers of Jesus we must expect the same.

These will be times of renewed faith and identity or these will be times of confusion, loss of identity and loss of hope. Will Mark's community redefine themselves and who they are by their mistakes and tragedies in their lives, or will they be defined by the story of Jesus, his rejection, his death, but by the reality that he said, "in three days he will rise" or in today's Gospel, "there is no one who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age...and eternal life in the age to come."

And so today in our lives we remember Jesus and what he said about being disciples and followers of the good news and what he said would be the great challenges facing people of faith in any age.

And what are these challenges facing those first followers of Jesus, the apostles, those early believers within Mark's community of faith, and those facing us today? They have been points of reflection and

challenge for us these past few weeks, continuing really until the end of the church's liturgical year in November.

Ambition - three weeks ago when the disciples were arguing who was the greatest in their group.

Control - two weeks ago when the disciples saw a man working a miracle and he was "not one of us".

The law - the Pharisees trying to get something to charge Jesus by asking him his opinion of the law (in this case, the law allowing divorce)

Wealth - the theme of this week's Gospel

Power - next week's gospel "can we sit - "one on your right and the other on your left when you get into your kingdom?"

The second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews is a strong challenge for us today in the church. "Brothers and sister, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart."

In our church, but especially in our lived experiences as parish, how do the issues of ambition, control, use of the law as a club, wealth, and finally power, how do they challenge us to grow and always define our identity.

And this is not only as a parish, but also in our families, our marriages, our children, our community and our nation: how does ambition and control get in the way, how do we sometimes use the law to beat people over the head, especially those we most love, how does wealth and the good use of wealth affect us in our daily lives and how do we want to use our power.

Our presences here is not so much to give answers to these questions but rather to challenge each and every one of us to use the nourishment of God's Word and of the Eucharist, to use our baptismal commitment to be a part of the Body of Christ, and then to go out into our real, lived lives from Monday to Saturday, to define ourselves as effective and living examples of who Jesus is? who we are, as his followers.

Audio Available

454

Ordinary Time 29

10/18/2009

Is 53:10-11 + Ps 33:4-22 + Heb 4:14-16 + Mk 10:35-45

Fr. Boisvert

Audio Available

455

Ordinary Time 30

10/25/2009

Jeremiah 31: -9 + Psalm 126 + Hebrews 5: 1-6 + Mark 10: 46-52

Fr. Boyer

In the eighth chapter of Mark's Gospel, a blind man is cured, and then Jesus begins his Journey toward Jerusalem.

Now it is the tenth chapter, and another blind man, this one with a name is cured. This is the last event before Jerusalem.

In the verses between those two chapters, Jesus has addressed a universal blindness to his identity and his message. He has tried again and again to bring his disciples to a new understanding of what a Messiah he will be.

He has spoken of power and authority; service and simplicity.

He has invited them to come with him and he has sent them out ahead of him.

Now in this final encounter, the seeker and the one sought meet.

A blind man begs for revelation. He wants more than sight. He wants to understand.

But look at what happens.

He twice shouts the truth: "Jesus, Son of David."

This is the only time this title is used of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

This blind man is shouting a name for Jesus that reveals the truth about Jesus; a truth others will not accept. And for doing so, he is hushed up.

He is not calling out for attention. This is a profession of faith.

This man has faith BEFORE Christ does anything for him.

Because of his faith, a blind man can see what others refuse to see.

Why? Because they have another agenda. They want something else.

They want power and prestige.

They want a place at his right hand.

They are so burdened by their riches that they cannot do without and want more.

In their desire to have more possessions, they fail to possess what really matters.

They do not accept the role and the identity of a true servant.

They want to be served, but as we heard last week they must do the serving.

There is so much about this story that is unique and profound.

In fact, this is not really a miracle story - this is not a typical "cure".

This is really a "call" story; an invitation more than a cure.

In this wonderful story, the seeker and the sought meet, and we are left to wonder which one is which.

Does the blind man seek Jesus, or is Jesus seeking the blind man?

They both call out for one another.

Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, and Jesus calls the blind man to himself.

Then Jesus asks: What do you want me to do for you?

We should recall that he just asked that question of James and John a few verses earlier while they were arguing over who was going to have a place of honor.

My friends, I believe that Jesus is still asking that question of each of us.

"What do you want me to do for you?"

Our faith has brought us far.
It has brought us to this place on this day.
Yet we still do not quite get it all - still do not quite accept the way of Jesus.
All of us try compromise, make excuses,
and try our best to negotiate our way into the Kingdom of God.
We're like that rich young man whose story we told a couple of weeks ago.
He asked: "What must I do?"

The answer, the truth, the reality of our call
to holiness and goodness, righteousness and salvation
lies in this profound and powerful story.
Like Bartimaeus who threw aside his cloak to come to Jesus,
we must cast off whatever shields us from the demands of the Way of Jesus;
we must quit sitting by the way like Bartimaeus at the beginning of this story
and start to move along the way;
most of all, we must begin to ask for what we truly need
not for what we want or would like to have -- but for what we really need
to make it to Jerusalem.

In every other healing story, Jesus goes to the one who is sick or in need.
In this story, Jesus calls this believing yet blind man to himself.
The man got up and walked to Jesus.
He didn't say: "I'm blind! I can't get there."
He threw off his cloak before he was healed and went to Jesus.
Bartimaeus is a model for every believer and disciple.
We must pray that Jesus will call us to himself.
This is the prayer of believers.
Asking for trivial things: prayers to pass a test, for good weather, and stuff like that
are silly and shallow - always letting us avoid asking for what we really need.
Sometimes I think it's because we are afraid of what will happen if we do ask.
We are about to profess our faith like Bartimaeus professed his faith.
We are about to be called to Jesus.
Cloaks of comfort and old ways of doing things, seeing things, and expecting things
have to go.
We have to quit sitting by the way and get up and start moving along the way.
It's might be time to quit our begging and get up and tell Jesus what we really need.

Audio Available

456

All Saints

11/1/2009

Rv 7:2-14 + Ps 24:1-6 + 1 Jn 3:1-3 + Mt 5:1-12

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

457

All Souls Day

11/2/2009

Wisdom 4:7-14 + Psalm 25 + 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 + John 11: 17-27

Fr. Boyer

Today we are about something that is uniquely Catholic.

To the best of my knowledge

we are the only religious tradition that prays for the dead;

a custom that springs from our profession of faith in the creed.

We know from the earliest history that the Christian communities

kept alive their relationships with those who had died

by frequent respectful visits to their graves,

and by unique and long cherished traditions of remembrance and respect.

All of this because we believe in communion,

because we believe that tied that bind us do not unravel with death,

that what binds us together is not these bodies we wear for a time,

but the communion we share through Baptism.

And so, here we are gathered together because, as this Gospel text affirms,

Jesus listens to the prayers of those who love him even though the response is at his own time and in his own way.

And so we tell the story of Lazarus today as we have for generations

for Lazarus is a symbol

that death can not lock in its dark chambers those whom Jesus loves.

Throughout the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul struggles with this question: "How are the dead raised?"

Paul never speaks of immortal souls, but always of the resurrection of the body, affirming that what is raised is a "spiritual body."

We affirm the same thing in the creed. Remember how it goes?

"I believe in the resurrection of the body....." we say, Sunday after Sunday.

Our faith is not in the immortality of a soul, but in the resurrection of the body. What Paul teaches us is that the body is not simply flesh and blood,

but rather it is the body that gives continuity to life through history

and allows us humans to relate to each other.

Body is what makes community.

I am coming to discover that calling this day: "All Souls Day"

is an unfortunate description,

but I am realistic enough at my age to know that I don't stand a chance

of changing that custom. But it is poor one for describing what this day is all about.

We are not here to remember souls.

We are here to remember people:

people who have made a difference,

people who have been linked to us by their body

and are now part of our communion in God.

We remember easily those who have given us our bodies,
our mothers and our fathers grandparents and great-grandparents.
We believe in the eternal life and the resurrection of the body.
In more simple terms, we believe that having been one with Christ through our body in Holy
Communion, we shall be one with Christ forever.

The promise that we shall not die has nothing to do with the corruption of this physical body, but it has
everything to do with our relationships and our communion together in Christ.
And so, we do not forget those who have gone before us.
Praying for them is no different now than before.
If we prayed for them before they died, why should we not pray for them today?

I have never much liked praying for souls in Purgatory.
There are no souls in Purgatory, there are people there.
They are doing now what they did in this life:
perfecting themselves in holiness and worthiness.
They are not punished nor deprived of anything.
They are faithful. They have departed.
The call that God gives us to salvation does not end with death.
Nothing really important ends with death.
It continues on.
Those who have died in the midst of their struggle for holiness
continue that struggle because
God calls them and us to that holiness and communion in His Son.
Those who have gone before us remain dependant on others for support and encouragement now just
as much as before.
Praying for the dead then, is not any different than praying for the living.
It is wishing them well, giving them support,
calling upon the action of God's grace in their lives.
We have, after all, helped each other through a lot of Purgatory already;
and we shall and ought to continue to do so, just as long as it takes.
Audio Available

458

Ordinary Time 32

11/8/2009

1 Kings: 17: 10-16 + Psalm 146 + Hebrews 9: 24-28 + Mark 12: 38-44

Fr. Boyer

We have made it to Jerusalem with Jesus

where it is one constant confrontation with the authorities.

But today, there stands before him, someone different from all the others.

They come with all their money, their wisdom, their experience, their authority.

She comes to teach what they cannot, and to reveal what they cannot imagine.

When we finish telling this story however, we have to ask a question:

is this Gospel story about the widow or about the scribes?

In the context of this Gospel our attention is being called to the Scribes.

The widow is used as an example. If we want to hear what Jesus is speaking of, we cannot read back into the Gospel what we want to think about.

The Jerusalem which Jesus has entered is not a place of welcome for his message.

He has nothing to offer those in control of the place.

There is nothing in his message that interests them or can improve their comfortable, safe, and protected lives.

The bottom line of this story is that this widow is supporting and helping the very people who ought to be taking care of her.

Jesus is not talking about her.

He is talking about them: the ones who like to sit in the front seats of the very synagogue she supports with out of her need.

Instead of sitting back and admiring her,

we ought to be wondering what's wrong with this picture?

What's wrong with a situation or an institution; or a nation or a culture that allows the most needy to take care of those who have the most?

What's wrong with exploitation of the most vulnerable, weak, and helpless by those who because of their gifts their wealth and their knowledge

ought to be, by God's plan, taking care of those vulnerable, weak, and helpless?

This Gospel is no glorification of poverty or of the generous poor.

Somehow, those who work with the poor discover again and again that the poor are always the most generous with the little that they have.

This Gospel is not urging some shallow interpretation that motivates generosity.

This is the Word of the Lord teaching disciples.

It is the voice of Jesus speaking to disciples about the "establishment", so to speak.

There are three points of focus in these verses of chapter 12:

the scribes at the temple,

the poor widow,

and the disciples to whom Jesus speaks.

We need to figure out which of these we belong to,

and what to do with the message.

A disciple of Jesus has already stepped out of the first group.

Jesus has not invited his disciples to this kind of poverty.

He warns them to beware of hypocrisy and avarice.

He warns them not to exploit anyone,

and proposes that they reflect upon the causes of hunger and poverty

and do something to eradicate them.

My dear friends in Christ,

work of that sort will take everything the disciple has.

The question today is: "Are we up to the task?"

"How much longer are we going to ask the poor of this world to take care of us?"

Some will find this a hard question and some will dismiss it as a "political" message.

I found it in the Gospel. It has nothing to do with politics.

It has everything to do with justice,

with greed and hypocrisy,

and with justice.

Audio Available

459

Ordinary Time 33

11/15/2009

Dn 12:1-3 + Ps 16:5-11 + Heb 10:11-18 + Mk 13:24-32

Fr. Dougherty

Audio Available

460

Advent 1

11/29/2009

Jeremiah 33: 14-16 + Psalm 25 + 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 + Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36

Fr. Boyer

That there will be a "second coming" is a fundamental element of Christian Faith.

How and when this shall occur has not been given us.

If it were, the way we live our lives would probably be quite different.

In fact, as I have thought about this, it occurs to me that the very reason why we live our lives is shaped by an expectation of a "second coming."

Then the "how" we live in this world will reveal whether or not we have understood and embraced the promise that there will be a second coming.

The birth, the life, and the death of Jesus Christ reveal something about us as much as about God. His absence from this earth is a reminder that this place is not our home.

We were not created to live here forever. We understand that from a serious reflection on the meaning of Jesus Christ. Within our own Catholic tradition, to make the point even more forcefully, we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Mother. We were not created, called into life, and brought into communion with one another and God to be at home here. Therefore, what we do here, why we do it, and how are serious matters that have something to do with whether or not we shall fear the second coming or anticipate it with joy.

Somehow we seem to be surrounded by people who do not believe this. In spite of the fact that they would like to be known as "spiritual" or "Christian" there is not much evidence that they expect any second coming or that they will be called to account for their stewardship.

The faith we share insists that we are guests on this earth; that it is not ours to use, to use up, or to abuse all to comfort ourselves with the best of everything right now no matter what the cost to this earth or to those who will follow us.

You remember that the first and earliest followers of Christ expected the second coming very soon, and so they lived in such a way that generosity, justice, forgiveness, and a constant concern for the common good was simply the way of life.

I am beginning to suspect that the delay in the second coming has been God's way of waiting to see if we get the point,

waiting to see if we really believe,

waiting to see who will live here in expectation that there is more to come which shapes and disciplines how they live today.

I wonder sometimes if our response to the depth and complexities of the challenges we face living in this world is not making us more shallow and more simple minded.

In the wake of another "black Friday" the evidence of our shallow values is overwhelming. Luke calls it "indulgence."

The demand for simple answers to complex problems polarizes us civilly, and all the while we grow more and more distant, more and more distracted, and more and more impatient with one another living more and more as if this was all there is.

"Bloated with indulgence and drunkenness and worldly cares" is the way Luke describes his times.

So Advent comes: four Sundays of reflection

and biblical reminders from God's Word that Christ will come again.
The feast of Christmas is not the concern of Advent.
There is more going on here than an annual pre-Christmas season.
The "coming" we sing about, the "coming" for which we prepare is not for a baby in Bethlehem no matter what poets may tempt us to imagine.
The "coming" for which we prepare is clearly announced by Christ to those who listen.
The warnings issued by Christ and sacred writers since His words were spoken urge us to take care that we may not become shallow and empty consumers.
They urge us to remember at all times that this precious earth is not ours to use, but a time and place for us to make ready, a time to perfect our skills as stewards, and a place for us to reveal in our lives what we believe and what we hope for.

In raising the thought and the promise of a Judgment,
I want to propose to you that there will be little to fear from that Judgment if we have daily judged how well our lives have been pleasing to God, as Paul suggests to the Thessalonians.
Shallow empty lives of glamour and comfort, entertainment and pleasure, silly and trivial matters will not bear up well under the Judgment to come when examined in contrast to the life of Jesus Christ. That life from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and everything that happened in between must be the model of what we shall become on this earth.
When we finally understand that and make it so, the first coming will awaken us better than it did some shepherds outside Bethlehem for we have seen what they did not see, we have known what they could never know: that Christ Has Died.
Christ is Risen.
and Christ will Come again.
Audio Available

461

Advent 2

12/6/2009

Baruch 5: 1-9 + Psalm 126 + Philippians 1: 4-6, 8-11 + Luke 3: 1-6

Fr. Boyer

Christ has died, Christ is risen, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN!

Remember that from last week? Good because I'm not finished talking about it.

We believe that Christ will come again,

and that expectation has given rise to some really weird ideas.

"The Rapture" which we who live here in this part of the country hear a lot about is a perfect example. Before the 19th century no one ever heard of such a thing.

The scheme comes from a British Preacher named John Darby

and it is the consequence of his mistaken literal interpretation of several passages of scripture. By taking several verses from different biblical sources out of their context he desperately reassembled these bits and pieces in a strangely literal way coming up with the concept of the "Rapture".

Those of us who grew up down here under the buckle of the Bible Belt know only too well what that's all about.

You know how the conversation goes:

"Are you saved?" A question which has no interest in salvation.

It means: "Do you believe literally in the bible like me?"

Right then and there, you're in trouble because no matter what your answer,

the questioner will determine that you are not saved

which means that when the end of time comes, and that's going to be soon, you are going to be punished.

It always makes me think of my mother saying to me way too often:

"You just wait till your Father gets home."

The Rapture of course is going to be pretty awful, so they say.

The saved, meaning the born again are going to be lifted up,

and then seven years of tribulation will set upon the rest of us, especially us Catholics.

There is an alarming popularity in this thinking, and there is something very wrong with it. It leads far too many Christians to believe in a kind of "shoot-em-up" "Terminator" type of Jesus who comes back to kill the bad guys and blow up the world.

Movie theaters pack in crowds who want to watch the end of the world,

and the more violent and bloody it is,

the more believable and the possible it become.

Now this kind of thinking has had a serious effect upon our lives and our culture.

This kind Jesus who comes in blazing and bloody starts looking like the right kind of Justice. Revenge and punishment start to take over and the God Jesus wanted us to call: "Abba" turns into angry monster who is bound and determined to get even.

This idea of Justice has nothing to do with Jesus Christ.

An expectation that the next coming will bring the Lion of Judah who will trample his enemies and spare the elect is twisted thinking that sells a lot books and abandons the Good News.

Because those of us who have begun to enter into the mystery of redemption and live in the tradition of our faith know there is something very wrong with this thinking, so we get tempted to not think about

the second coming at all. Since the Rapture thinking gets so much press we just stop thinking about Christ's return altogether. We forget what it is we wait for and instead of getting ready, we stay busy about today and tomorrow and little silly things that suddenly one day are not going to matter at all.

This is costing us a sense of urgency, and the fact that we live in a church that celebrates in cycles only makes it worse, because we forget as we go around from season to season that we are going someplace. This Advent could be a time to reclaim an urgency about our mission, not stir up fear that Jesus is going to come and destroy everything and everyone he doesn't happen to like. The truth is, sometimes there is not enough fire in us. Sometimes we forget that time is short and we have to be about something important: more important than shopping, football, how we look, and what we can do for fun this afternoon.

Rather than being distracted by silly talk of the "anti-Christ" we might do well to recognize that the enemy is within us, and that we have the potential of destroying ourselves through a catastrophic war with nuclear and biological weapons or through the slow but steady destruction of this beautiful planet.

Think of this: If you look at the history of salvation right down to the Incarnation, nothing happens between heaven and earth without the cooperation of humans:

No willing woman in Nazareth, no Jesus of Nazareth.

It still continues just that way. Our mission is to hasten the day of Christ's coming, and look forward to that day with joyful hope. Living now in this time between the first and the second coming ought to bring us a kind of peace and serenity from living and understanding the message and mission of Christ. It also ought to stir us with a passion for the possible that urges us day in and day out to keep on working to better establish the Kingdom of God to get it right and get it where it's supposed to be.

Even death itself is nothing to fear for those who have lived in expectation of what wonderful things are to come from a healing, loving, merciful God.

And so we can proclaim with confidence and joy:

Dying you destroyed our Death, Rising you restored our Life,

What's the rest of it? Lord, Jesus Come in Glory.

Audio Available

462

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2009

Genesis 3: 9-15 + Psalm 98 + Ephesians 1: 306 + Luke 1: 26-38

Fr. Boyer

It all starts with a greeting of an angel.

"Full of Grace" the angel says.

It is an affirmation of a gift, a gift we have all received.

But in her case, the gift was received before the bearer of the gift had come.

She was full of grace before the Son of God restored grace to creation.

She became then a promise of what we might become
if we imitate this woman of grace.

The second reading today from Ephesians

reminds us that a graced and blessed life is God's wish for every one of us.

We have been chosen to be "blessed in Christ"

and adopted as God's' own through Jesus Christ.

This fullness of grace that was Mary's gift from her conception
touches us all.

And so today we celebrate with Mary the gift of God's love, mercy and grace.

We take a day in the middle of Advent

to reflect upon what happens to us all

when we choose to "yes" to the life God has planned for us.

For Mary it was a life out of the ordinary, a life she never expected or imagined.

It was a life of unexpected surprises, of homelessness, of suffering, uncertainty,

and a life of sadness mixed together with the comfort of loyal companions,

the hope she learned from her own son,

and the Joy of the Resurrection confirmed and affirmed

as she sat in an upper room with the disciples on Pentecost.

She was asked to live differently than others.

She was asked to do something no one else had done before.

She was asked to risk the ridicule, suspicion, and judgments of her peers

all because she believed that God was asking something of her.

It is hardly different for any of us.

We are asked to live with a different set of values than the rest of this world.

We are asked to relate to one another as one loving family, to forgive,

to share everything we have,

to worship and honor God first every week on the first day,

and we asked to live justly and mercifully

even when we have not experienced justice and mercy ourselves.

We are asked to be chaste, honest, pure, patient, and show to anger.

These things are the marks of those who are called and chosen by God

these are the signs that mark those will be full of grace and full of faith.

As I said on Sunday,

nothing ever happens between heaven and earth without human cooperation.
The Kingdom of God waits for us make it a reality.
We are not waiting for the Kingdom of God.
It's the other way around.

In Mary Immaculate, God has shown us how the Kingdom can come to be,
In Jesus Christ by his suffering and death, we have become full of grace
and now God seems to wait for us to use our gift and celebrate the Kingdom he has promised.

No Audio Available

463

Advent 3

12/13/2009

Zephaniah 3: 14-18 + Psalm Isaiah 12:2-3,4:5-6 + Philippians 4:4-7 + Luke 3: 10-18

Fr. Boyer

Poor John the Baptist suffers from bad-press.

I think he needed a press agent or someone to put a good spin on his preaching.

His home in the desert as we have it described

does not exactly sound like a villa in Phoenix or Palm Springs.

Maybe it was his wardrobe or his diet that made him seem so scary

both of which seem to have caught the attention of writers.

Artists have consistently made him look like a raving mad-man.

But Luke treats him a bit more gently today.

John is not screaming rebukes trying to reduce a crowd to a pool of guilt and fear. While there is a sense of urgency about his message,

when you listen carefully without all the bad spin he gets,

he is encouraging not threatening.

The response he urges is not motivated by fear and terror,

but by a desire and hope for readiness.

"What shall we do?" they ask.

In fact, three times the question is asked by the crowd, by the soldiers, and by the tax collectors.

Everyone asks.

I find it interesting to notice that this is the exact question posed with the exact same Greek words in Luke's description of how the people responded to the preaching of the apostles on Pentecost morning,

"What shall we do?"

In some ways, it's a silly question and as often is the case, questions say a lot about the ones who ask them. It's a like a student coming to a teacher and asking, "What do I have to do to get an A in this class?" Duh!

How about showing up for class; paying attention, participating in discussion, reading the text book, and getting assignments done on time for starters!

Tax collectors as the question, and John says: "How about not cheating people for your own gain?"

Soldiers as the question, and John says: "How about not abusing your power like a bully?"

Of course they're all looking for some big thing to do, something extra ordinary perhaps to get some attention and look good when the time comes.

But that is not what they get from the response, and it must have left them stunned.

Instead of telling them to head to the Temple, to offer incense, light candles, start novenas or hold fast days, he tells them to be just, stop being greedy, feed the hungry, share their clothing and take care of one another. I would point out to you that this translation is not quite as specific. If it were more precisely translated from the Greek, would be clear that what John proposes is not a closet cleaning whereby you get rid of extras coats. The word he uses specifically refers to what is worn closest to your skin. In other words, take off the one you are wearing and give that someone who has nothing. Giving a spare is not much of a gift. You don't need it anyway.

He tells the powerful to stop victimizing the poor. The poor are not there to supplement and sustain the life style of those in power.

The message of John and of the one coming after him is first of all a social message that addresses

political and economic matters long before it turns to pious matters of faith. It is as though we have to get that right before we can show up at the temple with any authentic credibility. The conversion and repentance John calls for affects first of all the social life of the people who hear the message.

So, filled with expectation

we are like those who heard John and we still ask, "What shall we do?"

John has the same answer for us.

Readiness for Christ's coming at the end of our time

requires nothing spectacular and nothing we cannot do.

For people like me, it means giving all I can, being prepared for Mass, listening and guiding, leading and teaching, forgiving, comforting, and encouraging.

For young people it means being kind, faithful to your church, chaste, prayerful, and attentive to the Gospel, using your gifts and your time generously, and being good students open to learning and looking for wisdom.

For parents it means simply nurturing the whole life of your children spiritual, physical, intellectual loving them all the way even when the love is tough and painful.

For spouses it means fidelity, love, and sacrifice. It means presence, tenderness, attention, and willing forgiveness before it is asked.

For single people it means simply being who you are where ever you are;

living with integrity, sincerity, and confident that just as Christ is your companion every day, you are a companion to others. Do a good day's work as best you can.

For all of us readiness for Christ's coming means being and living just as God created and called us: living our vocation in fullness and in gratitude.

In the light of what John has to teach us then there is nothing for us to fear and every reason to live with the joyful anticipation that one day even if caught by surprise we shall be found worthy and blameless in God's sight.

Audio Available

464

Advent 4

12/20/2009

Mi 5:1-4 + Ps 80:2-19 + Heb 10:5-10 + Lk 1:39-45

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

465

Christmas

12/25/2009

Isaiah 9: 1-6 + Psalm 96 + Titus 3: 4-7 + Luke 2: 1-20

Fr. Boyer

I doubt that they stayed long, the Shepherds that is. Leaving the sheep even for a few minutes would have not been a good idea for whatever reason.

Trying to explain to the owners of their flock that angels had sent them to Bethlehem would probably not have been a very convincing or acceptable excuse.

To this day, there are some amateur astronomers who play guessing games about that star. They talk about a conjunction of planets and various other theories float around which might be a conversation that entertains imaginations,

but the fact of the matter is: Who cares? and What difference does it make? The star is gone.

In fact if you don't even believe in an actual physical star you are in no immediate danger of heresy.

There was no intent on the part of the writer to create a historical chronicle. Yet the story tradition give us says that the Wise Men went home, and like the shepherds they probably did not hang around long. It wasn't a particularly hospitable place. Bethlehem was a poor town.

I doubt that there was an Inn, Hilton or otherwise up to their standards. My point is, none of this lasts very long.

All of these people went home, back to work, and back to the normal routine of their lives. Even the angels who are so busy popping into dreams

disappear back to their heavenly home. The song they sing comes to an end and the sky is dark again.

It's is not hard to imagine that they were simply worn out from a noisy night in the fields,

from chasing a star that's there one minute and gone the next

to waking up people to invite them to Bethlehem or warn them of trouble or one more angelic choir practice to get that four part Gloria just right for Christmas.

Within 24 hours in some homes Christmas trees will be down,

decorations back in boxes, and stores will have Easter decorations on the shelves.

At some point in all of this before we do it all again, we might ask ourselves why and maybe start to remember what the real work of Christmas is, because our faith insists that this is beginning of something, and getting ourselves exhausted over the beginning does not leave much for completing what God has just started with the birth of God's only Son.

We have finished our period of "waiting" only to discover that there is more to this than waiting for Christ to come into our lives if for no other reason than because He has already come. Now God is waiting for us to figure it out. Victims of injustice are waiting for the "Just One." The hungry are waiting for their place at the table not the scraps. The homeless are still waiting for a room in the Inn - not homeless shelter. The broken wait to be healed. If we celebrate the coming of Christ we will finally have to ask why Christ has come. To simply say that Christ came to save us from our sins is just that: simple when the truth is: it is not simple. It is challenging. It is awakening. It is troubling. It is not simple.

For some it may mean leaving the sheep and risking the displeasure of those who own us one way or another. For some it may mean picking up our gifts to give them away to a foreigner who is unknown and we may never see again. For some it may mean waking up the sleepy, or disturbing those whose lives seem all planned out and settled. Whatever the case, in just a few hours or a day or two, we all go back to what we were doing before Christmas. Guests will be gone. Or if we're guests we will be back

home again. If we have failed to move deeper into the mystery of what this is all about and what it asks of us, it is all in vain on God's part and ours as well.

When all the feasting is over, the wrapping paper cleaned up, and the notes of gratitude written, it will be time for the real work of Christmas to begin. It's time to make peace and make music in every human heart. No one else can do it, and God waits for us to finish what God has begun.

Audio Available

466

Christmas Eve to the Children

12/24/2009

Isaiah 9: 1-6 + Psalm 96 + Titus 3: 4-7 + Luke 2: 1-20

Fr. Boyer

A Christmas Eve Homily 2009

Homily for the children

Delivered on Christmas morning after Mass because of Christmas Eve Blizzard cancelling all Masses

Just a little while ago there was a church like our church planning to have a Christmas pageant telling the story we just heard about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. All of the children lined up to get a part in the play. The teacher started out by asking who wanted to be Mary and every one of the girls raised their hands and jumped up and down to get attention. They all wanted to be Mary and wear the beautiful blue dress and hold the baby. Then the teacher asked who wanted to be Joseph, and all the boys waved their hands in the air and they pushed and shoved to get in front of the teacher.

Then it was time for the shepherds and the wise men, and everyone left wanted those parts because of the neat robes and they got to talk and carry the beautiful gifts. Then the angels got chosen and there was great excitement because they get to sing the best songs and the wings were fun wear and everyone would clap for them. Finally the teacher asked who wanted to be the donkey. The room got very quiet and no one raised their hand. After all, who would want to be a donkey? You don't get to say anything there is no song, no body claps for you and you just sit there and stare at Mary and Joseph and their baby.

The teacher was very sad because no one would raise their hand to be the donkey, and so that year there was no donkey in the play. In fact, that year there just was no Christmas at all.

If there is no donkey, nothing would happen in Bethlehem because Mary and Joseph could never get there in time. They would have walked.

If there is no donkey, no one could carry Mary, Joseph, and their baby away to Egypt to save them from King Herod who wanted to kill all the baby boys.

If there was no donkey Jesus could not have come into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and his last supper giving us his body and blood.

In fact, without the donkey, there might not be any story to tell at all.

The problem with being a donkey is that you never get much attention because everyone is looking at the angels and Mary and Joseph and those shepherds and wise men dressed up pretty and nice.

When you look at every Nativity scene, I want you to learn to look at the donkey and remember how important the donkey is to our story.

When you grow up I want you to remember that sometimes in God's plan it is better to be a donkey than to be an angel or the star of the show.

The donkey never got to say anything or look very pretty, but the donkey got to carry Jesus, Mary and Joseph to safety. The donkey had the best view of everything in that stable, and without someone willing to play the part of the donkey, there's no story to tell. I don't want you to grow up thinking you all have to be star of the show. I don't want you to grow up pushing and shoving thinking that the best parts in life are the pretty parts or the famous parts. Even if you don't end up playing the part of the donkey, always remember, recognize, and be grateful that some one plays the part of the donkey for us all.

Audio Available

467

Feast of the Holy Family

12/27/2009

Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14 + Psalm 128 + Colossians 3: 12-21 + Luke 2: 41-52

Fr. Boyer

There are two strong themes that weave their way through the whole of Luke's Gospel. One is a place the other is a person. This is unique to Luke, and as we now settle into the coming year with Luke's Gospel, these themes stand out clearly in today's verses and prepare us for more to come.

The place is the Temple. This place is prominent. It only takes Luke 8 verses in the first chapter to bring us to the temple. That is where Zechariah is conducting his rituals when he experiences the presence of God. After the story of the birth of Jesus, the next thing we hear is that Jesus is being brought to the Temple to be presented to the Lord. It is there that the ultimate theme of Luke's Gospel begins to unfold: The Holy Spirit. Chapters 9 through 19 form a journey narrative we shall explore this coming summer, and the whole purpose of the journey is to get to the Temple. Luke's Gospel ends where it begins: in the Temple. It is the first meeting place of the disciples after Pentecost, and there Peter works his first miracle.

So today's Gospel is not an isolated story. We must hear it and listen to it in the context of the whole Gospel. Our imaginations must be inspired by this Gospel so that the Holy Spirit may lead and teach us when we gather together here. It is Luke's Gospel that tells that the veil of the Temple was torn in two at the death of Jesus. Imagine that veil which separated the Holy of Holies, the Divine dwelling, from the human side being taken down, torn away so that the Divine plan which begins with the child Jesus could be fulfilled in the union between us and the Holy One. In Jesus a new Temple has come: a new place to meet, to encounter, and to discover the presence of God. In fact, the old one can be torn down for after three days, the new temple will rise.

The action in today's verses is in the Temple. The first clue to the identity of Jesus is given to us in the Temple. Do not be led by popular misunderstandings to believe that Jesus is teaching the teachers. It never says that. The astonishment of the rabbis in the Temple is simply a preview of the astonishment others will have at the authority of his teaching when he begins to teach in the Synagogues. The disciple who learns from Jesus is not those teachers in the Temple. It is the other figure; the other person so important in Luke's Gospel.

Here we get the other theme of Luke's Gospel, the person. It is his mother. She is constantly emerging in Luke's Gospel as the ultimate disciple. With her, and through her, Luke will put before us the model disciple. She will show us how to be a faithful disciple, and today, Luke tells how a disciple takes in what Jesus teaches.

She is the ideal believer.

Augustine said that Mary conceived Christ first in her heart before she conceived Christ in her womb. In her response to the Angel, she set in motion the Divine plan for us all. "Let it be done to me according to your will." is the heart of the prayer her Son will teach his disciples: "Thy Will be done." She hears God's word, holds it fast in an honest and good heart and brings forth fruit with patience. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. She listens, and ponders. When she does not understand, she takes in the word and rather than refuse what she may not understand, she waits, ponders, listens, and remains open.

We are almost left to wonder who it is that is lost in this story. It does not seem to be Jesus. He knew where he was and was beginning to discover who he was. He was finding his identity as a child of God, a Jewish man who kept and lived his faith. He was finding that in the Temple and in the Prophets and the Law. This was not a discovery that made him proud or led him to think he was special or excused from all the experiences of life. In fact, it made him humble; humble enough to go to Nazareth and be obedient to Mary and Joseph. He was not lost. It seems to me that Mary and Joseph are the ones who were lost, and so they do the seeking. Pay attention to where the lost go: to the Temple and to Jesus. Seems like good a good plan. The Boy Scouts taught me that when I was lost I should stand still and stay put. This Gospel suggests that when lost we should head for the Temple and for Jesus.

There are many times in my life when I feel lost, and I look out from here and into your lives, and recognize that I am not the only one lost. We come to this place to seek out the wisdom, the Spirit, the Word and the plan of God for us. This place is both our Temple and our Nazareth. This is the place where we can grow in wisdom and grace and find favor. The good disciple may not always understand. Sometimes there is anxiety like that of Mary and Joseph. Sometimes what we find is not always what we are looking for, not always perfectly clear to us, but we can learn from Mary how to make that work.

What she teaches she learns from her son: discernment follows commitment. Understanding God's will only comes from doing it. You first will and decide to be obedient to God, and then you will understand God's plan. It is not the other way around. We can never understand God's plan until we have become obedient. Jesus never understood or knew what the Will of his Father was until he became obedient and surrendered to it. Mary had already done that before she conceived him. We must learn from this wise, prudent, faithful, and perfect disciple.

Audio Available

468

Mary, The Mother of God

1/1/2010

Numbers 6: 22-27 + Psalm 67 + Galatians 4: 4-7 + Luke 2: 16-21

Fr. Boyer

It is the year 431. The Bishop of Constantinople has been preaching about Christ saying that "a baby of two or three months old ought not be called God."

He is not the first to think this, but he is the most credible and as Bishop of Constantinople, the most important person to say it. He is on good terms with the Emperor and feels safe. There are objections to his opinion about this matter, and before long word gets to Celestine who is Bishop of Rome that the divinity of the Christ is being challenged by the Bishop of Constantinople, and so there is trouble coming.

Not far away is Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria who hears of this teaching and begins to respond and correct this challenge to the expression of faith that has been tradition since a Council in Nicea a hundred years earlier formulated a Creed which said: "The Word became Flesh". Celestine in Rome and Cyril in Alexandria united in their efforts to correct this man named, Nestorius who was the Bishop of Constantinople. At their urging the Emperor ordered a Council of all Bishops to convene probably thinking that they would work it out and it would be a safe way for Nestorius to be heard with the protection of his favor. I doubt personally that the Emperor had much interest in such theological issues. He just did not want the Christian Churches fighting one another. No unity. No peace.

The history of this Council makes interesting reading from the point of view of human behavior, power politics, manipulation, and passion. Why they met at Ephesus is a good question except that it was "neutral ground" fairly accessible by land or by sea, and there was room in a great basilica. Now remember it was the year 431 so there was no convention center with grand hotels. Travel from any of the great centers of faith and civilization was a matter of months, not days. They were to convene after the celebrations of Easter and Pentecost, so it was summer time, late June to be exact, and Ephesus is in southern Turkey. Think hot! Think dry! Think formal ecclesiastic garments, add in great passion and determination, and then think: "Get me out of here."

Cyril came with 50 other Bishops. Nestorius came with 16. The Bishop of Rome stayed home probably because it wasn't safe to travel but sent delegates. Since he was not present, Cyril presided so Nestorius was mad and would not attend. He had a number of important supporters like the Bishop of Antioch, but they stayed away and kept sending messages asking to delay the start of the Council till they could get there; but those who were there, hot and miserable got tired of waiting. Cyril drafted a letter to Nestorius outlining his errors and asking him to clear things up and stay in unity. Nestorius refused. The Bishop of Rome joined in the persuasion, and Nestorius still refused forcing the Council to declare him a heretic and out of communion. The real and important consequence of all this is what we celebrate today: an affirmation of the unique divinity of Christ that preserved the human nature totally, entirely, from the moment of conception.

I tell you this story and share this history today partly because we've had a long two weeks of celebrations and festivities around Christmas and New Years, and partly because a lot of people mistakenly think this is a feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. While in English it may use her name, this is really the first feast of Christ the Son of God. It is a day for us to profess our faith in common, and affirm that Christ is God, and that the Word is made flesh.

Every age has struggled in one way or another with distortions and exaggerations or even outright error when it comes to naming and relating to Jesus Christ. In our time, it is the opposite of Nestorianism. Instead of exaggerating the human at the cost of the divine, we seem to toy around with the other side exaggerating the divine at the cost of the very real and very human man, Jesus Christ. We distance ourselves from him. We use his divinity as an excuse for not imitating him or believing that we can do what he asked of us.

It is the Incarnation that we celebrate today and in doing so we affirm that our God has come among us and shared every experience, every moment, every joy, and every pain of human life from conception to death. We are chosen by God in this way to share in Divine life just as God chose to share in human life. This is redemption! It is a new creation! It must leave us with hope in the face of every challenge and tragedy: hope that God is with us, and in His Son, he shows us how to live through every human experience. There is no human experience that Jesus Christ did not face and resolve with his experience and his teaching from the death of a child to a run away greedy son; from betrayal by closest friends to misunderstanding and slander; from being used by friends for their own advancement to the injustice of a death sentence; from the death of friends like Lazarus to the jealousy of his peers. He did it all and so can we is what God says to us in Christ because God is with us, God is for us, and God is within us.

Calling Mary the "Mother of God" is an affirmation of the nature of Jesus as "Son of God." While it names her and honors her role, this day is about Jesus Christ, and this day is about us and how we shall live in the year 2010 as God's chosen people.

It is reason enough to believe, to hope, and to wish each other a Happy New Year.

Audio Available

469

Epiphany of the Lord

1/3/2010

Isaiah 60: 1-6 + Psalm 72 + Ephesians 3:2, 3, 5, 6 + Matthew 2: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

The chief characters of these verses from Matthew's Gospel are obvious, and there have been enough Christmas pageants, plays, and rendition of their visit to the new-born to confuse and complicate our ability to grasp the message and the purpose of these twelve verses. We have given them names they do not have. We have decided that there were three when the Gospel never says so. We have sentimentalized the whole event to the point that asking what it's all about makes one feel like the Grinch that stole Christmas or Mr. Scrooge.

The challenge of what is implied here, and the purpose that seems to motivate Matthew is enough to make us uncomfortable if we really want to listen to Matthew's message and intent. He is always the Jewish writer tuned in to the prophets and the law and anxious to see the law and the prophets fulfilled. The vision proposed by the Third Isaiah which opened our liturgy today was a powerful influence upon Matthew. This image of a great throng of the saved returning home forgiven and freed by God's providence inspires Matthew to share his conviction that the coming of Jesus in flesh and blood, in time and space, has precipitated the fulfillment of the ancient prophet's vision. Matthew sees in these figures bearing their gifts all the non-Jews for whom the Christ has also come. It is a parade of nations who, like the Jews, have been invited to live in the light of God's peace and salvation.

Matthew's hope for universal unity poses a great challenge. Tribalism threatened the unification of the clans of Israel and Judah. Territorial disputes and conflicting loyalties to their leaders made for great conflict. The appearance of Jesus did not bring these to an end. Discrimination, power plays, and prejudice continued to thwart the vision; and it isn't just a matter of history either. We live in that history.

We can point to the Sudan, Congo, Ireland, Sunnis and Shiites, and countless other examples of prejudice, racism, aggravated by fear and hatred; all continuing to thwart the vision. But pointing the finger around the world is simply a kind of denial of our own condition and a failure to look into our selves. Racism has never been more powerful and more destructive than it is right now. This nation is secretly and savagely weakened and threatened by racism. Racist jokes, bumper stickers, tee shirts, and posters are everywhere shaming us with the truth of how deeply divided, suspicious, and fearful we are.

The vision the Prophet and the Gospel put before us must push us to move beyond pride and ego and, rather than blame another, make the first step toward unity.

Exclusiveness is a natural human inclination. Life is easier with people who are like us, who think the way we think, and do things the way we do. Including strangers different from us and from unfamiliar cultures is a major challenge. When we get down to the basics of food, water, clothing, shelter, and jobs, the desire to take care of our own grows stronger. The notion that we all do better, when we all do better is very attractive on paper until there is not enough to go around. But there is no mistaking or watering down the message of the Epiphany's story. God is inclusive, and God's people will be so too, or they will not be God's people.

Jew, Gentile, Christian, Muslim, Black People, Brown People, Yellow People, White People, Male,

Female, Gay, Straight: whoever, where ever are all invited, and if we can't get along respect, care for, and love one another here on earth, what's the point of thinking about heaven? What will be different there than here except we will have died.

In the background of these verses, a great evil lurks. Matthew calls him Herod. We would do well to pay attention to him - at least as much as we pay to those who come visiting. The figure of Herod in these verses points to the eventual rejection of Jesus not only by Herod but also by those who were disappointed at the manner in which he exercised his role as Messiah. Notice how indifferent those scholars of the law are as they confirm the information of the visitors. You would think they would pack up and go running along with these gift bearers: but not to Bethlehem. In their minds it's a slum.

The contrast between Herod and the Magi raises the issue of an internal struggle between the part of us that accepts the Messiahship of Christ and the part of us that refuses to embrace His teaching. Those teachings include a call to be open and welcoming to others, regardless of their differences, their looks, their language or their customs. The challenge we have today is to look closely at the Herod in ourselves, and step into the light of Christ out of the shadows of fear and distrust and take our place in the great immigration procession that will lead us home. We are all immigrants when it comes to faith. Leaving behind the poverty of our ignorance and our slavery to sin, leaving the danger of hatred and fear, we move out of the darkness to walk in the light of Christ. We must raise our eyes and look about not to see how we are different from one another, but to affirm how we look in the Light that has come shining upon us all. Only in oneness will the glory of God be revealed.

Audio Available

470

Baptism of the Lord

1/10/2010

Is 40:1-11 + Ps 104:1-30 + Ti 2:11-3:7 + Lk 3:15-22

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

471

Ordinary Time 2

1/17/2010

Is 62:1-5 + Ps 96:1-10 + 1 Cor 12:4-11 + Jn 2:1-11

Fr. Metzinger

Audio Available

472

Ordinary Time 3

1/24/2010

Nehemiah 8: 2-4, 5, 6, 8-10 + Psalm 19 + 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 + Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Fr. Boyer

To get to Nazareth Luke has provided us with several manifestations or "Epiphanies" that reveal who it is who has come among us and what is happening.

First the Shepherds had a manifestation. Then the church led us to Matthew for another with visitors from the East. Then the presentation in the Temple with prophesies and prayers by an old man and an old woman. Next Jesus was baptized and a voice from the heavens manifested the identity of this one Baptized by John. Last week we were at Cana for a wedding where another Epiphany moment occurs over jugs of water turned wine. Now we are at home in Nazareth where one more manifestation takes place in the synagogue. Amazement and wonder continues, and always the power of the Holy Spirit is unmistakable.

Our look at the people of Nazareth sitting in that synagogue is really a look at ourselves. Luke is not just giving us the facts of what happened on a particular day in a specific place. As the opening verses say, he is providing his Gospel so that we might know the "truth." By "truth" he is not referring to a provable fact. Luke wants us off the surface and the superficial. This is the meaning of "truth" in Luke's gospel: deeper meaning.

The people of Nazareth would rather stay on the surface, in the shallow. They begin by complementing Jesus with their superficial comments: "Isn't he nice!" "He uses such big words so easily." "We know his family, they're such nice hard-working people." "He has done wonderful things so we hear, wait till he does even greater things here at home." "He is our home-town boy."

Then he takes up the scriptures, and you notice he does not open the book to the lesson assigned for the day. It says he searched for a passage to read. Something different is coming. Then he speaks the first word of his mission. The first word publically spoken in Luke's Gospel is important. In that word his whole mission is summed up. He says: "Today." With that word, his mission as God's anointed is announced, and for Luke's purpose so is the mission of the church which proclaims the Gospel. The church too is anointed with the power of the Spirit on Pentecost. So the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church are the same.

It is a three fold ministry:

a ministry of preaching Good news of the coming of God's Kingdom

a ministry of social justice, bringing freedom to those held captive by forces of evil;

a ministry of bringing sight to the blind, that is, a ministry of compassion

To be Son of God is to be on a mission of liberation. Wherever human life is impoverished, imprisoned, impaired, it will become enriched, free, and enabled. All this will be done by the power of divine favor. SON OF GOD is not a title of privilege. It is a call to transformative action. (Privilege was the temptation just rejected in the desert.)

The people of Nazareth wanted privilege not a transformation into action. They wanted to be secure, affirmed, and receive the perks of being friends of Jesus. They were unprepared to recognize in Jesus the anointed one of God because they failed to see themselves in any of the prophet's categories (the poor, the blind, the captives and oppressed). Superficial and shallow, they looked after what they could

get, not what they could become. Their presumed privilege blinded them to the truth of their lives and they failed to grasp the initiative God was offering them. Blinded by their privilege of proximity and familiarity with Jesus, they quickly turned to resentment as they realize that Jesus has taken God's favor to others beyond Nazareth especially Capernaum said to have a heavy non-Jewish population. Resentment produces anger which is not really anger at Jesus. It is anger at themselves for their own failure, to live as the prophet has instructed them; so as always, the innocent, in this case, Jesus becomes victim of this anger. What they expel from that synagogue is not Jesus, but the truth that they are blind, captive, poor, and oppressed. They are offended, and so are we by God's grace to all those of whom we do not approve. Jesus does not go elsewhere because he is rejected. He is rejected because he goes elsewhere.

Today this Gospel is proclaimed in this church. We cannot leave here and remain shallow and superficially wonder what we will get because we are here. This was the mistake of Nazareth. We are to be transformed like the Son of God, anointed by the Spirit because of Pentecost our own Baptism and Confirmation.

We are commissioned to preach good news to the poor. To do that well, we must first know ourselves to be the poor transformed into a people who rely on nothing but God alone. That is poverty. It is not a matter of economics. It is a matter of where we place our trust and what we live for. We must know ourselves to be transformed captives free from slavery to wealth, possessions, status and power. God is our only authority, not what other people think. We must know ourselves to have been healed of our blindness to the presence of God in every human being.

The good news is preached best when it recognizes its solidarity with those who hear the message. We are still poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. Yet in the recognition we are released. What we see in the people of Nazareth, we must see in ourselves, and in the seeing become wise and stunned by the truth of God's grace to all and accept our call to extend that grace where ever it is dulled or dimmed by evil. This must happen today says Jesus through Luke, and "today" must never be allowed to become "yesterday" or slip again into a vague "someday."

Audio Available

473

Ordinary Time 4

1/31/2010

Jer 1:4-19 + Ps 71:1-17 + 1 Cor 12:31-13:13 + Lk 4:21-30

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

474

Ordinary Time 5

2/7/2010

Is 6:1-8 + Ps 138:1-8 + 1 Cor 15:1-11 + Lk 5:1-11

Fr. Gallatin

Audio Available

475

Ordinary Time 6

2/14/2010

Jeremiah 17: 5-8 + Psalm 1 + 1 Corinthians 15: 12, 16-20 + Luke 6: 17, 20-26

Fr. Boyer

As we pick up these verses of Luke's Gospel today, there are two points to notice.

First, Jesus brings himself on a level with the Twelve.

Then although a large group is there, he speaks just to the twelve.

This message is of utmost importance for his closest followers.

It is important to understand that what we have here is not a code of conduct that produces Christians.

This is not a prescription for how we ought to behave or live.

It is a description of what life is like for those who live in the Kingdom of God which has begun in Jesus Christ.

These are not conditions for inclusion in the realm of God.

They are indications of what life in the Kingdom of God is like even in the present.

We read these verses not to suggest that we have to become poor, hungry, or sad;

but to examine our lives in such a way as to discover whether or not we fit in with the Kingdom.

These are not scare tactics to stimulate a change of behavior.

What we receive through Luke's Gospel is a proclamation by Jesus

about the way life is inside and outside the Kingdom.

There is no proposal here about how to be happy.

This is not about the future either.

Remember the first word Jesus spoke publically in the Synagoge?

TODAY!

Rather than the word: "Blessed" we might get the point better if the text read: "Congratulations!"

Jesus is not suggesting that those at the bottom of the economic system are holy.

He is saying that those who are powerless and trust in God are successful

while those who live with the illusion that they are self-sufficient are failures.

Jesus does not propose that an empty belly makes for sanctity.

He is suggesting that knowing that we do not live by bread alone is really wise;

that experiencing restlessness and spiritual emptiness or hunger is a good thing.

Jesus does not promote tears and sadness. The truly holy are not glum miserable sour human beings.

He is suggesting that laughing at people, making fun of others, finding humor in racial slurs and jokes for example is a sure sign that one is outside the Kingdom of God.

Experiences of want: poverty, hunger, suffering create a void in us, and to this void Jesus speaks today.

In that void, in that want, hunger, and sadness, we can learn reliance upon God.

Those who experience it look to God to fill up what is lacking,

and they are heirs of the Kingdom of God.

Benedict XVI in his book, Jesus of Nazareth, proposes "that the Beatitudes present a sort of veiled interior biography of Jesus." He has brought himself to the level of his apostles.

He looks each one in the eye and tells each who he is.

If they wish to be united with him in his ministry, this is what it will be like.

They will be poor. Jesus himself has no place to lay his head.

They will be hungry as he is hungry.

They will weep as he weeps over Jerusalem and at the grave of Lazarus.
Their sadness will not be about themselves or their misfortunes.
It will spring from their identification with the oppression or suffering of others.
They will see the suffering of others and weep with compassion.
They will be persecuted as he is persecuted, excluded, insulted, and denounced as evil.
What they do and what they say will not be motivated by what others think of them.
If they are mocked, laughed at, ridiculed, or excluded: Congratulations!
This is a road map of discipleship!

Gathered in this place, just days away from Lent,
Luke offers us a chance to examine just how well we fit into the Kingdom of God.
This Gospel comes with an invitation to ask:
What good is it to be poor?
What good is hunger?
What good is sorrow or rejection?
People outside the kingdom of God would avoid these things.
Much more appealing are riches, full bellies, and the approval of others.
Jesus suggests that those who prefer these things have received all they are going to get
for these things are their own rewards.
When the present evolves into eternity, these things are not portable. They will be no more.

Live now the way of the Kingdom and live without worry or concern, anxiety or fear.
Do it today and be blessed.
Congratulations, says Jesus.
"This is the way I live." he says.
"Live like this, and live forever."
Audio Available

476

Ash Wednesday

2/17/2010

Joel 2: 12-18 + Psalm 51 + 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 + Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Fr. Boyer

It is important to notice that Jesus says:

"When you fast."

"When you give alms."

"When you pray."

He does not say:

"If you fast"

"If you give alms"

"If you pray."

Living our faith is not a matter of "if".

It is a matter of "when."

And so:

when you fast it is from more than food.

For a nation that can boast of a diet industry that rivals the gross national product of more than half the world, this is something to take seriously not just for physical health. A hunger pain is a wake-up call to remind us that we do not live by bread alone. We will not put meat on our plate for the next six Fridays because by our tradition, this food has blood, and so we keep Friday without Blood to remember one Friday of this season when Christ's blood shed for us all.

By fasting, we may savor the sweetness of all God's gifts.

Rather than gorge ourselves we simply sip and savor just a little to remember how good it is.

But taste is not the only sense of our bodies that should fast.

The eye can fast by looking less and watching less.

The ear can fast when it is closed to gossip and slander.

The tongue can fast when it speaks no evil, no anger, no lie, no rumor, no criticism.

Silence in this season may be the sound of God's call.

The hand can fast when it leaves things alone,
picks up nothing in the store that is not necessary,
and touches only to heal, caress, and comfort.

When you pray it is both public and private in praise and in gratitude.

It is alone and it is as a family.

It is as a church in Eucharist, in devotion, and in adoration.

The balance of all prayer is restored in this season when you pray.

Public prayer is a witness that calls others to prayer.

A blessing in a restaurant reminds others who may have forgotten who has provided what is shared.

It is not for show and admiration.

It is to acknowledge the source of all good things.

When you give alms,

it is an act of charity and an unmistakable reminder
that we are stewards of God's gifts.

Nothing is ours to keep.
All has been entrusted to us for the sake of others
so that none of God's children would ever be in want.
It is impossible to imagine that our God would leave someone in need!
When we think, "Someone should do something."
We have forgotten who we are and failed our calling.

Pray, Fast, Give. This is how we live our faith.
It is not a matter of if - but of when, and that time is the present.
In this we shall know the power of the cross with which we mark our heads this day recalling that we are
dust and to dust we shall return.
When we do return, we shall take nothing with us
which is reason enough to begin to give it up now.
When we do return to dust,
what we shall take with us is what we have done with what we have had.
Giving up is not all there is to Lent.
Taking on is more to the point.
So the question today I propose to you is not:
"What are you giving up for Lent?"
But rather, "What are you taking on?"
There can be only one answer:
"A Life of Prayer"
"A life of Fasting"
"A life of Charity."
In this life you will find life - life everlasting.
Audio Available

477

Lent 1

2/21/2010

Deuteronomy 26: 4-10 + Psalm 91 + Romans 10: 8-13 + Luke 4: 1-13

Fr. Boyer

Something will happen this afternoon at 32nd and North Western in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Oklahoma City. It is a ritual that profoundly expresses the nature of our church. Adult Candidates for Confirmation seeking full communion with the Catholic Church and Catechumens from all over the western half of this state will present themselves to the Archbishop in his Cathedral Church. There he will welcome them one by one and then proclaim them to be one with us in faith.

It is a rite that marks the strongest and most clear distinction between Roman Catholicism and other Christian communions because we are one church who assemble around one Bishop who is the vicar of Peter's successor in the city of Rome where Peter exercised his threefold ministry of teaching, sanctifying, and leading the Christians. We are not separate congregations scattered around who vaguely relate to one another by creed or confession when we need to and then act independently when it is more convenient.

Every year on the First Sunday of Lent, this rite takes place unseen to most of you unless you are a sponsor or a convert.

Every year on the Tuesday of Holy Week, another Rite takes place with the whole church assembled for the Mass of Chrism when those holy oils are blessed and then divided among all the churches for use during the year with Anointing of the Sick, Baptism, and Confirmation. The presence of those oils there at the Baptistry is a visible reminder that we are part of one Church with one Bishop.

Every year after Easter, the Archbishop comes to this parish church as he does all the others to Confirm in Faith the young people we present to him as examples of faithful lives and service. I do not exercise that rite, the Archbishop does, because we are one church.

Every time a couple comes to be married at Saint Mark or any other Catholic Church, the Archbishop is notified formally, and by a special document authorizes a local pastor to witness a Marriage in the name of the Church.

Every year in February we do something that expresses our faith and our commitment to this Church to which St Mark Parish belongs. It is a profession of faith and an acknowledgement that we believe, that we belong, and that we are responsible for more than the parish of Saint Mark.

It should be a matter of pride and of faith to accept a share in the responsibility for the support of the larger church, and for this reason, I present to you with no regret nor hesitation the envelopes and brochures you find now in the hymnal racks of your pew.

It is February and it is time to either renew your commitments made in the past, or for the first time to recognize what is your responsibility.

Every week, you support the ministry of Saint Mark Parish with all it's services, programs and administrative costs with insurance and utilities and repairs.

Every year, we do the same for the larger church, and now it is time.

If your circumstances make it impossible to do so this week, use the pledge card to do so later.

If your circumstances make it impossible to do as much as you did last year, do it anyway and see if God will make provide an opportunity to make up the difference.

If you did nothing last year, this is the time to re consider why you fail to contribute to your church when God expects it.

If you fill our the contribution portion of the brochure to day, give it to me after Mass. If you take it home for use later; bring it next week or the week after and add it to your offering.

The brochure lists very clearly the principal ministries you will be supporting. Everyone one of them affects and strengthens those same ministries here at home. Without the support of the Archdiocesan offices, we would be left without great resources, information, and leadership. I trust every one of you to make certain that the larger church continues to provide what is needed for continuing the work of Christ Jesus.

In the desert of today's Gospel, the temptations in each instance boil down to one thing: "Go it alone." or "Do your own thing." or "Take care of number 1" The temptations are subtle suggestions that Jesus should consider being someone other than what he is. He calls himself "Son of Man". The Devil calls him "Son of God." In both the first and third temptations, Jesus must decide whether he will save himself from suffering and death because he has the power to do so. The question then arises, does he use his power for himself or not? That is the root meaning of these tests. Luke ends by saying that Satan leaves Jesus for a "time". A final test is yet to come in Jerusalem while hanging on a cross when he will be tempted three times again to use his power to save himself.

This is the still the test we all must face as followers of Jesus today. Our culture offers endless possibilities for remaking ourselves with the priority on personal fulfillment and material success; but this not what we were created to be. We are not alone, isolated individuals. When Genesis says: He created them male and female - it means we were created into community and relationship. When one person eats an apple all are affected by that decision. What we do and what we fail to do has consequences on others. This is how we live as Church and how we work together in a larger community than Saint Mark Parish or Norman, Oklahoma. Think of this please when you consider whether or not to pick up and use that envelope.
Audio Available

478

Lent 2

2/28/2010

Genesis 15: 5-12,17-18 + Psalm 27 + Philippians 3: 17-4:1 + Luke 9: 28-36

Fr. Boyer

It's about glory, and not just about Jesus. What happens on that mountain provides for those present a glimpse of what they might hope for themselves. If you wanted to sum up the work of Jesus on this earth, it was simply to restore us to glory; to give us the glory of being a chosen race, a holy people who live in the presence of God. That is what happened to Jesus on that mountain top; he came into the presence of God. His mission was to take us there. Yet the truth of the matter is, there is work to do. One look at the human condition, the human family, and it doesn't look too glorious much of the time, and we know what keeps us from glory: Sin.

All of us are engaged to one degree or another in a personal, ongoing battle with sin and vice. We are seeking glory. Yet, sin is in the way. Although anger doesn't make most of us murderers, our lust doesn't make most of us rapists, and our greed and envy do not make most of us outright criminals, together with gluttony, arrogance, and sloth, there isn't much glory and those who have to live with us are miserable. Our failure to live up to the glory that is ours is as tragic as the unhappiness our evil causes.

There is a social dimension to all of this as well for which we are responsible. It works its way through our commerce our entertainment, and our whole culture. Pride, greed, and anger profoundly influence domestic and foreign policy. If we truly had generous and compassionate leaders who were imbued with the value of social stewardship rather than greed and ambition, we would not have tolerated the corporate scandals we have endured in the last ten years. "Every deadly sin fuels harmful social phenomena: lust-pornography; gluttony-substance abuse; envy-terrorism; anger-violence; sloth-indifference to the pain and suffering of others; greed-abuse of public trust; and pride-discrimination."

These sins are about what it means to be human and humane, not about what it means to be perfect or "holy." As long as there is any trace of them in our lives, we are less than human and less than what God has made us to be. We are far from glory. This is basic stuff. It concerns the core of what we are, of what we can become, and most importantly, of what we should aspire to be. We should be in glory. In the end, the question of what we want to be has an answer most of us would quickly give: happy. We want to be happy, but happiness is not dependent upon physical or material pleasure. In fact it is often hampered by it. Our culture teaches that pleasure and possessions are happiness with the result that pleasure is often substituted for happiness and meaning in life. No glory there. When a crisis comes along that pleasure cannot resolve a secular person runs to the psycho-therapist. It is not so for us. We have a treasure of wisdom and tradition, teaching and revelation that leads us to a life of virtue and balance, holiness and joy; that is glory! It is not that pleasure is inappropriate, but that it comes from character and virtue, and a right relationship of one's self to others and to God. That is where we shall find pleasure, and that pleasure leads to glory.

"If we do not take seriously our capacity for evil, we are unable to take seriously our capacity for good." There will be no taking credit for the good that we do if we fail to accept the blame for the evil. So, I am inviting you to spend three nights this week reflecting upon "The Seven Deadly Sins". Unlike our bodies influenced by our genes; our souls, our spirit, and the lives they animate are free to be shaped by our

choices. We can choose to be whole. We can choose glory. There is more and better in us than we have chosen to become. Accepting the fact that we sin is a summons to life.

We are always inventing gods. It seems to be a characteristic of our age and perhaps every age. The god most popular this day is a god who does not demand much of us, is certainly not a god that punishes, although we don't mind a reward now and then. The sentimental god of most sappy religious pop music is a god that just pats us on the head like grandpa and sends us on our way. With a god like that, there is certainly no need to trouble one's self about the devil but there's the trouble. The devil's best trick is to convince us that there is no devil.

We recognize evil in others, but if we ever want to see the face of sin, we must look in the mirror. All we see in others is it's reflection from ourselves. The honest among us know that what we always criticize first in another is the very thing we dislike in ourselves. Sin is our secret from others. Only we know where and how deeply it has taken root in us. Saint John says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

When we recognize and confess that sin and our inclination toward it is a part of our nature, and that we alone will never wholly eradicate it, there is at least something for us to do in our lives that will not in the end seem just futile and absurd. We can make sense of our lives because the existence of evil presents us with moral choices, and in making those choices, we form our character. We have been given our nature, but we choose our character. When we say someone is a good man or a good woman, we do not suggest that they are people in whom there is no inclination to evil, but rather that they are people who have wrestled and still wrestle with it and never give in because their quality and their goodness comes from the struggle. Those people are truly noble. Glory is theirs.

"Morality is like art, said G.K. Chesterton, "it consists of drawing a line somewhere." We live in an age in which no lines seem to be drawn at all, or those that have been drawn are being erased. In my 67th year of life and my 41st year as priest I have come to recognize that an unhealed wound, a kind of sinful restlessness, afflicts humanity and robs us of glory.

Almost four years ago someone gave me a copy of the newly translated Don Quixote. I'm reading it, but it's slow going. I tried many times over my years in College to read it and gave up. This new translation is more to my liking and I may throw a party when I finish it in the next week or two! In this classic piece of literature I recognize the Knight Errant's vain search for the impossible dream as my own. Millions of people appear to be looking for the ideal marriage partner, the perfect child, the utopian community. Some disappear into a world of alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, or violence in an attempt to calm their restlessness, to satisfy a need that they cannot name. I am a Bruce Springsteen fan. "The Boss" wrote a song that describes our age when he sings: "Everybody has a hungry heart." I think we are hungry for glory, hungry for the life we should have had by God's will and God's original plan for us. But we have traded our glory for something else, and sin is the consequence. Our hunger is for God and the glory that comes from being in God's presence. The glory of Jesus Christ came from his willingness to suffer and in obedience to the will of his Father. Calvary was no short-cut to glory. There isn't one. We will have no glory from a short-cut either. We cannot fill ourselves with things that do not satisfy, that do not fill us or lift us or hold us up. Yet we fool ourselves into thinking it is possible. As a result, our humanity has lost much of its real glory and beauty. It is less and less a mirror of the creator. That's what is going on in this Gospel – on that mountain top. Those apostles saw the glory of God, the glory of God in humanity. It is possible, it is desirable. It is God's will to have God's glory revealed in human nature; not just his Son's, but in all of us. I want to propose to you that if we can take our sinning seriously we

might at least find that we can be interesting again, and so can life itself, and then we shall find glory.

I invite you to give three evenings this week for the sake of the truth and glory; three evenings in this church for the sake of life itself, your life. Tonight we shall reflect upon Pride and Envy, tomorrow night Anger and Sloth, Tuesday night Greed, Gluttony, and Lust. I've saved the best till last! I hope to see you again for prayer tonight night when we might begin to consider how it is that we satisfy our hungers and our thirst, because "everybody has a hungry heart."

Audio Available

479

Lent 3

3/7/2010

Ex 3:1-15 + Ps 103:1-11 + 1 Cor 10:1-12 + Lk 13:1-9

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

480

Lent 4

3/14/2010

Joshua 5: 9-12 + Psalm 34 + 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21 + Luke 15:1-3,11-32

Fr. Boyer

A parable about a Father is also a parable about the children.

We know that Jesus used this parable to reveal something about God His Father.

And in the person of the older sons Jesus speaks of the elders, chief priests, and Pharisees about their stubborn and hardened hearts.

Luke takes the parable and uses it as the last in a series of three parables about celebrations over the recovery of something that was lost: sheep, coins, children.

We can tell the parable about ourselves, and in the middle of Lent, that might be the best reflection of all as we move into the last weeks of this holy season.

There is no doubt that a mood of joy and hint of celebration breaks into this season today; but it is about something yet to come with a parable that is unresolved. We never know from the details that Luke provides if the party ever takes place. It stops uncomfortably short with a conflict unresolved.

Besides being a story of mercy and forgiveness, patience and love;

This is a story of entitlement. "Give me what should come to me." says the young man. He expects the father to hand over everything to him and to his brother, and he wants it now. He gets what he wants, and finds out it is not what he needs. His hunger is not for food because after having all that money can buy, he is still hungry and lonely. At home he had everything he needed and could ever have asked for. He has a moment of grace and goes home where there was more than food and drink, shelter and safety. There is a father who loves and waits.

Besides being a story of mercy and forgiveness, patience and love;

Entitlement and enlightenment, this is a story of resentment and anger.

The rule-keeper, the dependable one, the responsible one is filled with resentment.

When we tell this parable in this church it becomes our story.

While there may be some here who have come home after leaving us

hopefully finding what the younger son found at his return,

most of us here are the rule-keepers, dependable, and responsible.

While there may be some whose sense of entitlement leaves the rest of us to do all the work, contribute the funds, provide education and formation for their children, a pretty place for their weddings, comfort and food at their funerals, while they spend on themselves, we must look deeply into this parable for our own place in the story.

Resentment and anger have no place among us as a church, as a nation, as a human family. Both entitlement and resentment break the bonds that hold us together.

When they meet head on, there can be no celebration, no party, no rejoicing.

We are asked to do more than just our duty. More is needed than just keeping the rules and being dependable. Self-serving righteousness in the end does more damage to this family than selfish entitlement. Neither work for the common good of the family, but the resentment seems hardest to overcome. Resentment is built upon perceived inequality and comparison. This man evaluates himself in comparison to his brother. It is not surprising that he comes off looking good: too bad he did not compare himself to his father. This man is reward driven. He works for what he can get, not for what he can give. He thinks it is all about rewards, and when that attitude meets grace, resentment erupts like a

volcano. We understand him because he is so much like us.

The speech of the older brother is almost stunning in its selfish righteousness. I did this, I did that, I have always, I have never....on an on he goes. It's all about him.

Perhaps he thinks that his portion is now threatened by the return of his brother. Suddenly his attitude of entitlement and privilege gets in the way.

One squanders and the other hoards not spending anything to even entertain his friends. Both complain about what they have NOT been given.

Greed and Jealousy have made them both blind to what they have been given.

That older one thinks it's all about him; but it isn't.

It's about a father who waits and watches, and simply says:

Everything I have is yours."

Can we hear that news?

Can those words melt the hardness of resentment that is killing us?

Will those words ever quiet the restless hunger that makes us greedy and jealous creating the silly sense of entitlement that drives us apart and tears at our unity?

"Everything I have is yours".

In the middle of Lent comes the shocking news of grace and what it uncovers.

There is still no rejoicing, no party, no celebration.

For two reasons, some will not let go of their past sins and cannot quite believe that we are sons and daughters of a God who says: "Everything I have is yours."

You do not deserve it. You do not earn it.

The other reason is that we continue to work for rewards and for what we can get and the simple presence of abundance means nothing to us while we grow in resentment and anger looking at what others have and judging our selves by comparison.

Only when we break lose from these ways of thinking and acting will we get inside and hear the music and know that we are home.

Audio Available

481

Lent 5

3/21/2010

Isaiah 43: 16-21 + Psalm 126 + Philippians 3:8-14 + John 8: 1-11

Fr. Boyer

There is something timely about this Gospel story that gives our age something to reflect upon revealing two serious issues in our life style that are in conflict with the Will of God as Jesus reveals it. One cuts through every element of our society; every age, every culture, every neighborhood. The other is a more "adult" issue, but its seeds are planted early and when we look at it more seriously, it becomes a painful, sad, and serious challenge to our way of doing business as usual.

In the law of Moses, both parties to adultery are guilty and are to experience the same punishment leaving us to wonder why only the woman is brought to judgment. Herein lies the two issues. The first issue is that she got caught. More and more often in our culture it seems that getting caught is now the most serious issue. What you do, if you can get away with it is just fine. The real disgrace in our days is getting caught. I see this in our children and it frightens me. Talk with any teacher anywhere and I believe they will affirm that today's children are more concerned with getting caught and spend more time thinking about how to avoid getting caught than they do deciding whether something is right or wrong. The shame they feel comes from getting caught not from what they did.

The problem in this Gospel story is that she got caught. Her partner seems to have avoided that scandal: never mind what the two of them were doing. At another layer of the story, the stone throwers seem very interested in dealing with the one who got caught perhaps relieved that they have not been caught. Do you not wonder if her partner in this sin might have stood there with the biggest rock relieved that he had not been caught?

Let's not get out of here today without some serious thought about this matter. The white-collar crime of our age is the first tip of the ice berg warning us that concerns about being caught are not the best of motives for a just, moral, and good life. From athlete celebrities to politicians, the disgrace these days seems to be found in getting caught while we just shrug off real failures and sins. Not getting caught seem to give permission for continuing immorality. There is something wrong with this picture suggests the eight chapter of John's Gospel.

The other problem exposed by this story comes from the fact that the woman stands there alone. Again, where is he? Did he get away? Was he well known? Did he have friends? Regardless of the answers, the Law they were invoking called for both to be judged and punished. Something is out of order here and a just society should be troubled. Unequal justice is not justice. The injustice of sexism is not easy to avoid. This "good-old boy" system that has a crowd of men holding rocks bringing a woman to justice while one of them is absent doesn't seem quite right to Jesus. And so something in our culture and society comes into critique by the Gospel: sexism. Whether it has to do with adultery or more subtle forms of injustice, something is out of synch with the Gospel, and the truth is; it is evil. It worms its way through our so-called Christian society from top level boardrooms through court rooms down to classrooms and it isn't just about equal pay for equal work either. It shows itself in divorce courts, entertainment, and commerce. The treatment of women all over this earth can be called into question by any serious reflection on this Gospel, and the Gospel intends it to be so.

Reducing this story to a lesson on the sixth or ninth commandment trivializes the bigger and more

serious issues of Justice, Mercy, Compassion, and Repentance it raises.

Getting out of here today without reflecting upon this matter too should not be possible. In the Kingdom of God there will be no male and female, there will be no two levels of justice, no good old boy system, and no advantages for men over women. In fact, if we listen carefully to the Magnificat and its promise, the great reversal expected at the coming of the holy one might give us cause to get anxious about maintaining things the way they are.

So what seems to be a simple Gospel story we have heard enough times to recite by memory is not so simple. It is fun but very distracting to sit back and wonder what Jesus was writing on the ground when in fact we're never going to know. To even be distracted by that gesture is to avoid and deny some very challenging things being raised by the Gospel itself. In the end, the one being accused in this story is not the woman. The one being accused is Jesus, and we use this Gospel in this season to prepare ourselves for the accusations to come in the next ten days. The trial of Jesus has begun.

Judgments are about acts not about people. Jesus condemns the act between this woman and some man, but he does not condemn the woman. The crowd wants to judge the person and thereby avoid any judgment of acts perhaps because in judging the act they will have to look at themselves. Let's take a look at how much we are concerned with getting caught and how that shapes our choices. Isn't it odd that sometimes we spend more time thinking about how to cover our actions or excuse ourselves than we do considering whether something is simply right or wrong? And then a deeper awareness of the evil and the power of sexism might awaken us to greater justice and compassion that makes us more ready for this Kingdom that Jesus proclaims has already begun.

Audio Available

482

Passion Sunday

3/28/2010

Lk 19:28-40 + Is 50:4-7 + Ps 22:8-24 + Phil 2:6-11 + Lk 22:14-23:56

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

483

Holy Thursday

4/1/2010

Exodus 12, 1-8, 11-14 + Psalm 116 + 1 Corinthians 11 23-26 + John 13: 1-15

Fr. Boyer

Anthropologists and students of human history can get all excited with discussions about “homo sapiens” over the question of when this species became “human”. In other words; at what point in time do humans made in the image and likeness of God appear in this vast space of creation? If you think out of the box of biblical fundamentalism, it’s a fascinating question.

The discussion might suggest that “human” behavior and our ability to identify homo sapiens as “human” began when the first one stood upright.

That is an interesting and thought provoking idea.

Another second might suggest that homo sapiens became human when it first made tools. The idea here is that something happened when the imagination sparked to life and there was a switch from using rocks and tree limbs to actually making tools by hand. It is an idea with some merit.

A third suggestion I’ve heard from some scientists is that homo sapiens distinguished itself from all other creatures when it first began to laugh. We do believe that no other species in creation experiences or exhibits humor and laughter. The proposal then follows that the sound of the first real laughter was the moment homo sapiens emerged.

Now I am leading you into this reflection because I have yet another proposal.

Mine has no scientific back ground and is not particularly biblical; but it is profoundly theological in the sense that it leads us to reflect upon and discover something about God that is revealed to us in human nature which is very much at the heart of what we are doing here tonight, what we recall, and why we do it.

I am beginning to think that homo sapiens becomes a human being when it first made bread. That is to say, when we first planted, harvested, ground wheat, baked, broke, and shared; in other words, when we learned or discovered the consequences of doing something and waiting for the results turning those consequences into something for another.

When creation arrives at that point, it is the day of human birth.

That is the day when we begin to participate in something divine.

It is the day when we begin to realize what it means to be made in the image of God. Tonight we must ponder very deeply what it means for God to be revealed in Bread, and we must come to realize that it certainly means that we are to do more with this Bread than Eat. Until we plant a seed, wait, harvest, grind, bake, break and share, we are not anywhere near becoming a Eucharistic Community.

Audio Available

484

Good Friday

4/2/2010

Isaiah 52: 13- 53:12 + Hebrews 4:14-16,5: 7-9 + John 18:1-19:42

Fr. Boyer

Some one once said, and I wish I had thought of it, that a cynic is a person who has given up..... but not shut up. Isn't that wonderful? It's so true! This world is full of cynical people. They are everywhere. They are on radio talk shows. They write acerbic letters to editors. They are talking heads on television. They shout out in congress proclaiming Armageddon, and a few sit in theses pews hopeless and angry, cynical and negative. One great cynic is featured in John's Gospel. He has given up but does not shut up – hopeless, his cynical exclamation ought to leave us stunned yet challenged, looking and longing, restless and miserable, dissatisfied and searching. In the 38th verse of chapter 18, the cynicism stains the page with bitterness and hopelessness. "Truth," Pilate sneers, "What is that?"

Caught between Jesus and the leaders of the people he listens trapped between what they said and what he said both insisting that they are telling the truth. How often have we been there; trapped between what one says and what the other says, both insisting that they are telling the truth. We hear it from politicians, and sadly enough, we even hear it in the church. The New York Times says this about the Pope, the Vatican says something else. Fox News says this, and CNN says that. Democrats say this is the truth, Republicans insist that they know the truth. In the formerly respectful, polite, halls of congress, someone shouts; "Liar" at the elected head of State. It's the cry of a cynic. The child comes home from school and says the teacher said this, and when questioned, the teacher says, "I did not", and the battle begins. The boss at work says one thing, and another insists that he said something else. Before long the seeds of hopelessness are sown deeply and begin to spring to life and a cynic is born.

My people, the cynic is without hope. The cynic has given up. Pilate gives up and the Truth gets crucified. In spite of all appearances, this day is about hope, and if this day does not stir hope in the human heart, all is lost, this death we remember today was in vain, and we are left to shout at each other in anger, in fear, and we shall be hopelessly lost forever.

Pilate wants to know what Truth is, and Truth is right in front of him, but it is not an angry shouting mob. We want to know truth, and we live in a world like Pilate's not knowing who to believe even when we really do know the truth because sometimes recognizing and accepting the truth will require courage or a change in our thinking and behavior. We live in a world in which heads of state lie openly to advance their agenda or to conceal their sins; a world in which attorneys, guardians of the law, advise clients to deny the truth, conceal facts, and lie in order to "get off."

We live in a world where parents tell their children to lie about why they have not been in school or church, or why the homework isn't done. We live in a world just like Pilate's where the good-old-boys hide their friends and their crimes and pass the blame. It's all a trap into which the hopeless can fall and be lost.

What is to become of this nation?

What is to become of this church?

What is to become of us? If hopelessness and the cry of the cynic has its way?

We have no future, and there will be no Easter.

The faithful believer, the true disciple of Jesus Christ does not look to others to save, to rescue, to

relieve, heal, or calm the storm.

When we are caught and know not which way to go,

When the truth seems impossible to grasp, to find, or to hold on to,

There is only one place to look and that is to Christ Jesus, the one who is the Truth. No one possesses Christ. No one possesses the Truth.

Truth does the possessing.

What we must remember and discover in the telling of this passion story is that looking only at Christ leads us to truth, the truth about ourselves; and looking only to Christ secures our hope when there is every reason to be the cynic.

We do not give up on ourselves, or on each other.

We do not give up on our dreams and hopes

that rest upon the Gospel's vision of the Kingdom of God.

We do not give up on this church which is founded upon a group of men who fled at the first sign of trouble and one who outright denied knowledge of Christ not once, but three times.

We do not give up on a vision of justice for all

even if securing it is expensive and means some sacrifice of comfort and security.

This day in the face of the cross and standing at the feet of a dead man is about hope believe it or not. If you believe it, there will be something to do tomorrow night in this church.

If you don't your cynical cry will face a growing shout of Alleluia.

Audio Available

485

The Great Vigil of Easter

4/3/2010

Gn 1:1-2:2 + Gn 22:1-18 + Ex 14:15-15:1 + Is 55:1-11 + Ps 51:12-19 + Rom 6:3-11 + Mt 28:1-10

Fr. Boyer

I was wandering through the garden section of a store last week anxious to get some spring flowers started, but not quite trusting the Oklahoma springtime. Among the various garden tools, fountains, and ornaments was a great fire-pit on sale for \$275.00. These things seem to be in style for the patio dwellers among us, and it's not surprising. Fire light, fire warmth and the mood these can cast over us even after the fireplace inside our homes is cleaned out from the last winter evening is long lasting.

Our ancestors huddled around fires to ward off cold and the dangers of the night.

In that firelight they told stories about where to find food and water, how to survive, and they retold the stories of their great ones. As the night wore on, they wondered again and again about who they were, where they came from, and where they were going. God was in their stories; and we are still doing the same thing. Dancing flames enchant us with warmth and peace. Around them we form friendships and deepen family bonds. Sometimes we sit in silence and sometimes ask the same questions our ancestors asked about who we are, where we came from and where we are going. God too is in our stories.

Tonight with ancient ritual behavior we have done it again. We have quieted the chaos of contemporary urban life with the warmth and intimacy of a fire. We have shared our collective story of how God has called mothers and fathers like Abraham and Sarah, leaders and prophets like Moses and Miriam to birth us and lead us out of slavery. In spite of our unfaithfulness to the Covenant God has with us, God remains faithful and sent his only Son to confirm the Covenant with his own Body and Blood. He came to show us the way home, and he died to show us that no tomb cannot hold love down.

The one who is light, and truth, and the way is also the life giving water, and he has led us through that water once more to dry land and the promise. The stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. There is nothing for us now among the dead because we are among the living. We come to know ourselves as living not because we breathe, but because we believe. Those who have gone down into the waters of Baptism have risen to new life. Those anointed with the Chrism of Salvation are anointed by and with and within the anointed one himself. Those who share the Body and Blood of Christ share in the victory feast.

We gather in the darkness of this Holy Night year after year because we have seen the light and fear no darkness. We tell again the story of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. This is the story of God's faithfulness through all time, and the story of what makes us the People of God. This is the story that gives our lives meaning and hope for a future where death is only a birth into more and greater life.

For the last three nights we have been telling the greatest and most profound love story any one could imagine. Now the risen one stands among us wounded yet reaching for us to warm, heal, quench our thirst and feed our body and our souls with his Body and his Blood. What can we say: but Alleluia, Amen!

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad.

Audio Available

486

Easter Sunday

4/4/2010

Acts 10:34 -42 + Psalm 118 + 1 Corinthians 5: 6-8 + Luke 24: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

This is the Day the Lord has Made, Let us rejoice and Be Glad!

At first it was eye-witnesses whose experience of the risen Christ moved people to faith in the resurrection. We shall tell their stories in the next few weeks.

But those eye witnesses one by one died leaving no one who had actually seen the risen Christ.

Those who came to faith by the testimony of the eye witnesses were left with a different circumstance and perhaps a greater challenge.

They could not claim to have seen the Risen Lord as had the older ones.

Their testimony had to rest on something else.

We who celebrate this Easter might pause to think about just how it is we came to our faith in the Resurrection.

I have done just that in the past few days during the Triduum.

I have wondered how I came to this faith that gives me such courage, such joy, and so much hope. I doubt that my experience is unique, which all the more gives me reason to trust this faith and the experiences that have led me here.

It can hardly be different for you.

I know that I came to faith in the resurrection from a handful of witnesses none of whom claimed to have seen the risen Christ or to have discovered an empty tomb with men dressed in white robes.

Their lives were hardly that exceptional.

In fact, calling them "witnesses" might evoke a laugh from one or two of them.

They never stood up in church, on a street corner, or a class room and preached a sermon. They simply lived good and faithful lives marked by charity, patience, kindness, forgiveness and gentleness. Don't get the impression that they were pious and spent more time in church than anywhere else. They didn't. On the contrary, they were passionate, sometimes angry in face of injustice, and impatient with evil and wrong-doing. But they never judged people, only behavior. They were grateful people and simple never expecting anything when they gave. They never pushed themselves forward in line, but kept looking back in case someone needed to get a head of them. The only time they looked down on anyone was to lift them up.

What I have come to understand is that in seeing these people, in living with them, and enjoying their company and friendship, I was reminded of things that Jesus said and did. These people made me remember Jesus.

Before we can believe, we have to remember.

Luke tells us that those visitors to the empty tomb were told by the two men in dazzling garments that they should "Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee." And then Luke says, "They remembered his words."

Then it starts, story after story, pointing to the fact that until they remembered what he said and what he did, they did not understand or believe.

My dear Easter friends, before we can believe, we have to remember:

Remember what he said, and Remember what he did.

And so we must know the Scriptures not like a study-guide for countless classes of bible-study, but as the Living Word of God which creates and forms us. We can study it all our lives, but until we begin to live it, it will not give us Life.

Once we do begin to live the Word, forgiving, healing, reaching out to the forgotten, challenging systems and ways of thinking that lay heavy burdens on others, we will have remembered and we will have come to believe and we will have life. I am beginning to understand from this Gospel that it is not breath that gives us life, but Faith that gives Life.

Resurrection faith is an invitation to remember what Jesus said and did.

It was not the empty tomb that brought Peter and the others to faith.

It was not necessarily the news those women brought to them either.

Not until Peter and the others remembered did they come to believe.

That is what happened to those men walking to Emmaus:

that stranger opened the scriptures for them and invited them to remember.

Today we remember, my friends. We remember what Jesus said and what he did. It is far more important than remembering an empty tomb. We remember what he left us, what he called us to become, and what he gave us in the Holy Spirit; a new relationship with God and with each other. Our best and greatest hope must be that what others see in us will help them to remember what Jesus has said and done. Our best and greatest hope is that by remembering, they too will come to faith in the resurrection as we have come to faith.

What came out of that tomb was love – the one and certain thing that death cannot destroy. We who have lost loved ones know this to be true because in spite of death, we can still remember; and that is all those two men in dazzling garments suggested: Remember.

When we do, we will believe; and as long as we remember, our faith will never be shaken. Only when we forget do we get into trouble and into fear.

Remember!

This is the day the Lord has Made. Let us Rejoice and Be Glad.

Audio Available

487

2nd Sunday of Easter

4/11/2010

Acts 5:12-16 + Ps 118:2-24 + Rv 1:9-19 + Jn 20:19-31

Fr. Gallatin

Audio Available

488
Confirmation 2010
4/16/2010

Abp. Beltran

Audio Available

489

3rd Sunday of Easter

4/18/2010

Acts 5:27-32 + Psalm 30 + Revelation 5: 11-14 + John 21: 1-19

Fr. Boyer

On this date in 1968 I was ordained a priest at age 25. Wheat was growing where this church now stands: wheat that would become bread, bread that would feed us and bring us to this day. More than half of this parish was not even born, but God had a plan that one day we would be here together and that we would break and share the bread that wheat has given us; and that we would share the promise and the faith that God would stay with us and Jesus would send their Spirit. With the deepest and most intense gratitude to God, and my most sincere gratitude to you, I break the bread of life and break open this word of God today thankful that you are so patient, so kind, so willing to look beyond short-comings and inadequacies and look for the hand and the face of God in an aging servant.

Now it begins very early in life for all of us. The earliest signs are seen in tiny children who pull away from a helping hand. One of the first words in every child's vocabulary is: "No". Then comes: "Let me do it." And before long, its "I want to do it my way." And the trouble begins. I can't think how often as a priest I have stood by helplessly and watched a spouse who has lost a partner in the midst of their grief try to go back to life as it was – or try to continue living how and sometimes where they lived for years with a husband or wife who is suddenly no longer there. Eventually it does not work. Nothing is the same, and no matter how hard or how long they try, something new must happen. We all eventually discover that you just can't go back.

The church, the faithful followers of Jesus Christ are discovering that by the time John writes his Gospel. The disciples experienced that in the days following the death of Christ. Those who came to faith by their witness a generation later realized that coming to life in Christ was more than a profession of faith. It was a whole new way of living, of seeing, or thinking.

Peter is that church along with his fellow disciples.

They have lost their companion,

and in their grief they want to go back, and so Peter says:

"I'm going fishing." But it does not work.

There are two problems with Peter's fishing trip.

one: they are fishing at night.

two: Peter starts the whole idea thinking it's about him as he says:

"I am going to fish."

By the time this story is over however,

it is day light and the nets are full, but Peter didn't do it.

Peter has placed all his hopes on his own unaided efforts.

When the others join in this kind of wrong-headed thinking,

They are in for a night without success.

Not until they are obedient,

until they follow the Master's instruction do they get anything

and when they do, it's more than they could have imagined.

There is a message here for us from John's Gospel, and it is an important one for people like us who like to do things our way when we feel like it.

This kind of thinking and approach to life cannot work for disciples of Jesus. John's Gospel gives some important instructions to the first generation church, and to us as well.

When we come to believe in the risen Christ,

nothing can ever be the same in the way we think and the way we act.

If we go back to the old ways, nothing will happen – empty nets.

If we start to think we can do anything on our own or do anything our way,

Nothing will happen – empty nets.

Peter and his friends fished at night thinking that they would fill those nets on their own – empty nets, but then comes the morning.

Now they can see the master on the shore,

and following the instructions of the master on the shore, things are different.

Like Easter morning, it is John and Peter again who come to this moment of faith.

John proclaims his faith in word, and this time Peter proclaims his faith in action:

he jumps into the water.

There are all kinds of theories, ideas, and ideologies around these days about how to fill our nets, our bank accounts or portfolios; about how to have peace, prosperity and security. Some of them are born out of disappointment or anger the same feelings shared by the disciples of Jesus in those days after their hopes collapsed on a cross and before an empty tomb they did not understand.

This Gospel affirms what we may already know from our fishing at night:

If we do not follow the instructions of the master, it is all for nothing no matter how long we fish.

Remember, they had been told by Jesus that from then on they were to fish for people. In the vision of John's Gospel and the Kingdom he proclaims, there will be no fishing in the dark for food from the sea. They will fill their nets with people who will be fed by the master on shore. Fish and Bread is what he used to feed the multitude several chapters earlier there beside the sea. The mandate for us is no different. Children of the light as we have become and celebrated in the Great Vigil of Easter, we must and shall do everything as the master has instructed. When we do there will be food for plenty, the nets will be full, and he will look at us again and say: "Follow me" not to the cross, but to glory.

Audio Available

490

4th Sunday of Easter

4/25/2010

Acts 13: 14, 43-52 + Psalm 100 + Revelation 7:9, 14-17 + John 10: 27-30

Fr. Boyer

It takes more than ears to hear the Shepherd's voice these days. The age of technology has led us into a life-style of imitation. Hardly anything is real, and finding something real these days takes skill, critical observation, and an ability to discern what is fake and cheap. Digital reproductions trick the ear and the eye, and they leave us satisfied with what is fake and false. We live now in perplexing society of wolves dressed as sheep, of pseudo-values marked as good. Political parties claim to support the politics and politicians of "values" but no one ever says what those values are.

Hearing the voice of the Shepherd is getting harder with all the noise of this society.

In fact, listening is becoming a lost skill.

When we run into someone these days who is a good listener, we know that we have found someone unique.

There is something going on among us all these days that confuses hearing and listening. We have decided that people who do not listen have not heard; and then we say that those who do not agree with us or do what we want have not listened; which of course is not true. Just because we don't get our way does not mean we have not been heard or no one listened. It seems to me that hearing comes first. It is the immediate perception of a sound. It is a recognition of the other. Listening comes next. Listening is more involved and requires some attention and reflection. It is not something easily done while doing something else. When is no double-tasking when listening.

When Jesus says that his sheep hear his voice, he means that the sheep recognize the shepherd. It is the first step toward conversion, the first step toward the relationship, the first movement toward listening. Hearing the voice invites us to stop and then listen. For those who would be disciples of Jesus, hearing the voice of the shepherd is the ultimate, relentless priority. But there is so much noise in this world: so many fake voices, so many fake shepherds promising so many pseudo values that are all substitutes for something real.

Members of this flock who hear the voice of Jesus know their shepherd, and they stop to listen.

Yet the culture in which we live today does not value what it takes to listen.....

silence, attention, devotion, respect, desire, openness are the tools or the skills of a real good listener.

These are the qualities of a disciple. Those who would be disciples of Jesus Christ must be so today in a nation of choice where there is so much noise and so many conflicting voices that we can confuse freedom with license, and individual choice has boundaries: an unwanted pregnancy, a dying old man, a boring marriage

all become subject to individual discretion or choice. Any challenge, any question, any suggestion that something might not be right

is shouted down by the noise of individual freedom and the demand for one's individual rights!

Hearing the voice of the Shepherd is impossible while individuals demand their way, ignore the common good, and shout down those who do not think their way or share their so-called "values."

It will never be possible to hear the voice of the shepherd with all this noise. It will never be possible to

tell was is from what is fake. We have to find some quiet time in our lives, some quiet time every day or we shall never discern the Good Shepherd, the True Shepherd, who has come to show us, to lead us, and to call us to the Father.

If we cannot hear the voice of the Shepherd, we shall never belong to the flock.

Audio Available

491
First Holy Communion
5/1/2010

Fr. Boyer

Audio Available

492

5th Sunday of Easter

5/2/2010

Acts 14:21-27 + Ps 145:8-13 + Rv 21:1-5 + Jn 13:31-35

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

493

6th Sunday of Easter

5/9/2010

Acts 7: 55-60 + Psalm 97 + Revelation 22:12-14, 16,17,20 + John 17: 20-26

Fr. Boyer

(The Ordo provides the option of using Easter 7 or Easter 6 on this Sunday because The Solemnity of the Ascension is celebrated next Sunday. I have chosen Easter 7 for use here at Saint Mark Parish.)

First he pours out his blood.

Then he pours out his Spirit.

Think of that in your prayer as we move toward Pentecost in two weeks.

He gives what he has been given:

His life, his flesh, his blood, his spirit.

The glory of the Father becomes his glory so that we might have glory.

While he had every right to lay claim to it, he never claimed any privilege.

Never once does this Son of God act as though or even think as though he had a right to or deserved anything.

Jesus clings to nothing as though it were his privilege.

Everything he has and everything he is he passes on to his friends

Putting them on the path to perfection and an ever deepening unity.

Everything given to Jesus is immediately given away to others.

It is this action of self-giving that creates the unity he knows is the will of God.

The very essence of Jesus is the sharing of that essence with others.

Those who receive it from Jesus give it to others.

And so a living chain across time and across history is established.

This receiving and this giving among the friends of Jesus then creates a unity

that becomes a message to the world that knows nothing of unity;

a world that lives by taking and holding, and therein lies the difference and the challenge.

The message of this Gospel,

the message Jesus speaks to his disciples around a table is not Take and Hold.

The message is Receive and Give.

What he leaves behind, what he prays for at that final meal

is a new way of being human.

Instead of being unique, individualistic, separate, and independent,

the new humanity Jesus restores is one and united.

This unity is the consequence of giving and the deliberate decision not to HOLD.

Those found in unity are never people who take. They are people who receive.

At the very first moment we begin to give what we have received,

a bond is established that is profound and divine.

When we share the sorrow or the pain of another, we are one with them.

When we share the joy and dreams of another, there a bond between us begins.

The experience of this unity which is God's will for the human family

is not just emotional or spiritual.

When we share what we have received, there is peace and there is unity.

If we share clean water there is a bond between nations.
If we share opportunities, education, health care, the resources of this earth
because we do not have some exclusive right to them
but because we know we have received them as a gift,
unity and peace are not far behind.
But if we take and if we hold, trouble comes.

The whole life of Jesus is summed up in his final prayer in John's Gospel.
It is a new way of being human.
Two words sum it up: Receive and Give.
The old way of taking and holding is finished if there is ever to be peace.
The fulfillment of the Father's will: "That they may all be one."
is only possible through this new way of being human
which Jesus passes on to us through his body and blood and by his spirit.
Audio Available

494

The Ascension of the Lord

5/16/2010

Acts 1: 1-11 + Psalm 47 + Ephesians 1: 17-23 + Luke 24: 46-53

Fr. Boyer

The last two Sundays in John's Gospel have found us at the table.

There we feasted with the words of Jesus about love and unity,
about receiving and the peace that comes from giving what we have received.

It is a feast that stirs the human heart with hope
and a quiet joy that strengthens and builds courage.

John puts those words in writing for a people at the beginning of an age of persecution standing at the
threshold of violence.

The prayer of Jesus at the table sustains them

and anyone else who faces trial and trouble

with a faith made bold by the presence of one who promised never to leave them

and one who had been victorious

after being abandoned, betrayed, mocked, tortured, and killed

by the very people he cured, comforted, and forgave.

In the language of friendship, belonging and love,

Jesus describes relationship with God; and then suddenly he is gone.

Suddenly in absence there is presence:

absence for those who would cling to the earthly Jesus as Mary Magdalene sought to do that Easter
morning prompting his warning: "Do not cling to me."

and presence for those who continue to gather at the table

to feast on what has been written, break and share what has been given,

and experience the Joy of life in the Spirit.

It is this absence that provides this presence.

Think of that scene at Emmaus.

The discouraged disciples invite that stranger to stay with them.

They sit at a table discussing what has been written.

They break and share what they have been given

and then suddenly there is absence, he is gone.

But gone too is their sadness, their fear and discouragement.

Because of a presence, they rush back to Jerusalem to share what their friends in Jerusalem have
already discovered:

HE IS STILL WITH US WHEN WE ARE TOGETHER AND DO WHAT HE SAID.

This 2000 year old gospel tells the story of Jesus' return to God

with images out of a 2000 year old imagination

about where God is assumed to be in that first century mind.

To go to God in their imagination was to go up in the sky.

That is why they went to mountain tops to pray getting closer to God.

However we might imagine or visualize the ascension of Jesus,

this moment begins his real absence.

It is an absence that could cause fear and disappointment.

It is an absence that could cause discouragement and a loss of faith.
Yet it is also a moment that begins his real presence.
It is a presence found in relationships of love and service
It is a presence found in breaking and sharing, forgiving, and healing.

This Feast today leaves us to wonder where he goes and where God is.
Hungering still for communion, searching still for God,
this feast brings us full circle,
back to the table, back to what has been written, and back to each other.
Clues into the mystery of where God is
start in friendship, in love, and in the human heart.
The interpretation of those clues,
the understanding of what they mean and where they lead begins in this assembly.
Here we gather week after week, as did those apostles,
to remember, share, and review again what has been written.
Here upon those present comes the Spirit, the Advocate, the Power, the Wisdom, the Courage, the
Prudence, and the PRESENCE that leads us to victory and peace.

In the ascension Jesus passes over into communion with God
and the wide gulf between the human and the divine
is bridged now in both directions.
What began at Christmas with God coming into human flesh
is now finished with the human becoming divine.

I have always been fascinated by the detail in Luke's Gospel which says:
"He led them out as far as Bethany."
We must not miss the implications of this behavior.
He took them out of Jerusalem, out of the seat of power, out of their home,
away from what was familiar and trusted and predictable.
He took them out of all that to little old Bethany
where so many awesome signs and wonders had taken place.
Bethany, remember is where Martha, Mary, and Lazarus lived.
He still takes us out; he still leads us away from places of comfort,
from places of power and predictability for one last word
inviting us into his presence after which we can return with Joy
to world that knows too little of it.
Audio Available

495

Pentecost

5/23/2010

Acts 2: 1-11 + Psalm 104 + Romans 8: 8-17 + John 20: 19-23

Fr. Boyer

John says the doors were closed "for fear of the Jews."

That strikes me as a little odd since they were themselves all Jews.

It leaves me wondering what it was they were really afraid of.

The absence of Thomas on one occasion

would suggest that they were coming and going,

so they could not have been too afraid of the Jews outside.

It would be easy and simple to suggest that they were fearful

for their lives because of their association with Jesus of Nazareth.

But the Gospel accounts are not flattering about their loyalty

or the strength of their companionship.

They talked big now and then, but when the crises came,

they were nowhere to be found.

I am not convinced that they were afraid of the Jews,

or that they were afraid of what was going on outside.

I suspect that they had those doors locked to keep Jesus out.

The women had already told them that they had seen the Lord.

They knew he was up and around.

Friends had come back from Emmaus

confirming the story of the women.

Wouldn't it be more possible and even more likely

given our human nature that there was more to fear than the "Jews"

whoever they were.

The "authorities" certainly had their chance.

If they were after Peter and his friends, they would have taken them that night in the garden when Peter

tried to turn the scene violent.

They probably feared facing the Lord more than anything else:

facing their own failure,

their cowardly behavior,

their failure to understand and believe,

their failure to get started with what he had taught them

and asked them to do.

So they locked the doors in fear

even though or maybe because he had risen.

We could talk about the Apostles in their locked up room all day,

but all that does is leave our own doors locked against the risen Christ.

Here we are, not much different from those apostles

living with our fears that all too often keep the Lord locked out

or at least a safe distance.

Most of us are not really afraid of anyone outside.

Like the apostles, I think we are afraid of what will happen if we open up and let the Risen Christ stand before us.

We compartmentalize our lives and our faith.

It's like a lock on the door.

We lock ourselves up avoiding the changes we know living our faith all day every day demands.

It's easier to keep things in separate little compartments than face the changes living with the Lord requires.

Church on Sunday – Business as usual on Monday is a locked door.

Sometimes I suspect not coming to church is a way to avoid or hide from the risen Christ, it's like sitting in a locked up room.

Refusal to consider a vocation,

pushing the thought of giving one's life in service and prayer for others is a locked door. Keep Jesus out, and I can do what I want.

This Gospel speaks of Christ breathing on his disciples.

You have to get close to someone to breath on them.

In fact, it's a rather intimate experience.

This day we call Pentecost celebrates the fact that Christ

can and does get through locked doors,

that the Spirit of God blows where it will,

and eventually even those hiding are going to experience the breath of God.

The experience of these apostles tells us that it is not a bad experience,

and that opening the doors is a lot better than living with them locked;

that facing the risen Christ and what he asks of us

is not at all impossible, unpleasant, or frightening.

It suggests that even people whose faith is shaky,

whose loyalty to Christ is questionable,

who talk big and act small, who pray a lot and do a little,

who cannot always be counted on when times are tough,

and who are filled with doubts

can still do something great

if they are willing to face their fears in the company of the risen Christ.

Audio Available

496

The Most Holy Trinity

5/30/2010

Proverbs 8: 22-31 + Psalm 8 + Romans 5: 1-5 + John 16: 12-15

Fr. Boyer

People who cannot live with the experience of not knowing everything have a difficult time with the Christian faith and experience of God.

I think that is why some people are so marginal with our faith tradition which is so steeped in mystery, wonder, and awe.

There is a young boy in our school who delights in performing magic tricks.

He is already to show me another one.

Something happens between us when he is finished with his performance.

I always gasp in wonder and praise at his abilities to trick my eye.

Then there always comes an uncomfortable moment when I think we want me to say "How did you do that?"

I never do say that

partly because I don't care,

and partly because I want to respect his skills.

I feel as though he has every right even at his age to know something I do not.

There is something in our culture that abhors not knowing.

There is something in our culture that insists

that if there is something we cannot understand science will figure it out and if science does not,

then we made it up and it is simply a projection imagination and it is not real.

We are living a time when "mystery" is simply not tolerated nor accepted as an explanation for anything.

The consequence of this is that we come to the sacred liturgy

with only one expectation: to get something out of it.

Standing in awe in the presence of God

moved by the beauty of music and word,

the smell of incense and candle has no place in our expectations.

Our public debates about the dignity of the human person

always revolve around issues of choice, convenience, and cost

rather than around the unrepeatable and irreducible value of a man or woman made in the image and likeness of God.

And so we do not look at one another or even at strangers

with any sense of wonder, awe, or respect

until we decide they don't want something we have

or may not take something we want.

Consequently we find ourselves in the quicksand of debate

over immigration and health care,

and we talk of rights and privileges and entitlements

as though the sum of a human person was just a number of chromosomes that can be reproduced in a Petri dish.

No wonder. No awe. No mystery.

I enjoy reading mystery novels, but not to figure out before the end who did it.
I enjoy them because they are involving,
and they draw me into the adventure and the relationships,
the details, and the risk of wondering and imagining.
The pursuit of the bad guy is consuming and involving.
There is no rest until the bad guy is brought to justice.

The mysteries of the Christian faith are just the same.
There could be a way of describing the Catholic religion as a "great pursuit."
There is no doubt that this religion is involving and consuming.
It can envelope our whole life.
These Christian mysteries tease us into pursuit and raise our curiosity
like the little tricks of that fifth grader,
that bring us to awe and wonder.
After all, what's the point of faith, of believing, and of trust,
if we already know everything there is to know.
Happily we never get to the bottom of these mysteries.
If we did, our faith and the religion in which we express it would be over.
Removing a sense of mystery creates an artificial sense of mastery
which inevitably leads us to look around and say: "Is this all there is?"

We baptized believers in Christ have been brought by our baptism into a mystery.
The beauty of the earth, a sunset, the ocean or a summer breeze,
the beauty of a lover's face or a child's smile does not need nor require an explanation: only a response
of awe and love.

So it is with God on this Sunday we call "Trinity."
The being of God is best experienced and named: a mystery.
Our minds in this age and culture want to explain and sometimes defend this God who is revealed to us
as Father, Son, and Spirit.
It might be better to forget figuring it out
and put our minds to better tasks of solving more immediate problems.
If we did, we might recover some of the wonder and awe and sense of mystery that makes life and all
our brothers and sisters who share this life
a lot more interesting, engaging, and fun.
Audio Available

497

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

6/5/2010

Genesis 14: 18-20 + Psalm 110 + 1 Corinthians 11: 23-2 + Luke 9: 11-17

Fr. Boyer

Indiana Jones in the "Last Crusade" received a diary from his father with clues and a map for finding the Holy Grail, the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. His father had been on a search for the Grail and had mysteriously disappeared.

Indiana Jones, guided by the map begins a frantic search for his father. With the map, he sets out on his mission determined to beat an enemy to the Grail; an enemy who planned to use the Grail for evil purposes. It was the belief that this cup had supernatural powers to work miracles.

It makes for a great story both as an adventure film, but also serves as chance to get something clear. The cup is insignificant. It has not power at all. What is in the cup matters, and what is in the cup has the power. More to the point, it is the Eucharist that is power, A power we might all do well to seek, but not for the power itself, but for what the power can do.

This day gives us the chance to make our own search, and this Gospel is our map. The power of God is not found in the Holy Grail but in the real presence of Jesus Christ whose blood is shared in this Eucharist. It is the presence of Jesus Christ in his blood and in his body that real power is found to work miracles.

There is a painting by Pacino di Bonaguida entitled "Tree of Life" hanging in the Academy Art Gallery in Florence. It depicts the crucifixion of Jesus on a tree, with twelve branches on which are hung circular illustrations of the significant moments of the Christ event. The top circle of the painting has an illustration showing a mother pelican feeding her young. This image is rooted in a pre Christian legend that during a time of famine or draught, a mother pelican would wound herself, striking at her breast with her beak in order to nourish her brood and stave off their starvation. Drawing on the same ledged, Thomas Aquinas composed the hymn known as "Adoro te devote" and applied the image to Jesus "O loving Pelican! O Jesus Lord! Unclean I am, but cleanse me in thy blood, of which a single drop can save the whole world." In every reading today this saving power of blood is celebrated.

In all of history there is evidence that blood is sacred and appreciated as essential to life and the exclusive property of God, the author of life. Because of this blood figured very importantly in the relationship that Israel was so privileged to share with God. While the Israelites were enslaved among the Egyptians, blood on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelite homes served as a sign of protection and delivered them from death. After being led to freedom and to a future that held out the hope of a land of their own, the people of Israel sealed their new relationship with God with the blood of sacrificed animals.

The implication of this action is that those bound to one another by this covenant of blood would rather die than breach their relationship in any way. History still tells us that the covenant was broken repeatedly, but God's great and generous mercy renewed it again and again until one last time in Jesus Christ.

It is our belief that this final covenant is the end and the best of all. With profound and dramatic simplicity, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it, aware that his very self would soon be

taken, broken, and given so that sinners would be blessed with healing and forgiveness.

At every Eucharist, these words are spoken again as the action of Jesus is repeated leading believers enter into the triple dimension of Jesus' life. This holy memorial is the source of our strength and unity, and the sustenance that feeds our faith, fires our hope and inspires our love.

This act of holy remembering is charged with a challenge: those who are fed by Jesus and bound to him, to God and to one another through his blood-sacrifice are also taken by him, broken like him and given as he was

so that others might know something of his life and goodness in us. If we do not want to be broken and be shared, we shall not be blessed, and ought not to take this cup

which contains the power to work miracles.

Audio Available

498

Ordinary Time 11

6/13/2010

Samuel 12: 7-10, 13 + Psalm 32 + Galatians 2: 16, 19-21 + Luke 7:36-8:3

Fr. Boyer

A story of extravagant love excites our imagination, stirs our hopes, and challenges our spirit. A Pharisee with a name invites Jesus to dinner, but obviously not for any reason other than the desire to watch Jesus or trap him in some way. The most common sign of respect and honor is absent: no foot washing. A woman without a name gets into the house somehow says not one word yet preaches a powerful sermon on love. The story has always left me wondering if this Pharisee, Simon did not set up the whole thing. After all, how would that woman have gotten into the dinner? Posing as a servant? I doubt it. Poor Simon accuses Jesus of not being able to see what kind of woman is there, but Simon cannot see what kind of man is there in Jesus.

All caught up on externals, Simon is horrified that the woman has touched Jesus.

Yet it seems to me that Jesus has somehow touched her in a way he cannot touch Simon.

In Luke's Gospel this story comes just after Jesus has responded to the question of John the Baptist about who he is. The people have begun to think Jesus is the Prophet, and Simon the Pharisee is determined to show that Jesus is no prophet. The best prophet in the room is the woman. She knows who this is, and she knows what to do about it: Love, and show it! This woman has found healing forgiveness, and out of love she comes to Touch, to kiss, to wash the one who touched her heart and forgave her sins. She isn't there to earn forgiveness by groveling on the floor. Her sins were forgiven before she got there because she believed.

The faith of this woman is the point of this story, Faith its consequences of forgiveness and loving service is what Luke invites us to see. Her faith freed her from more than her sin. It set her free from shame and from guilt. Once free from the power of that shame which is always hidden like a secret, she cares nothing for what others may think of her, ignores their stares and remarks, and comes publicly with love and joy to touch the feet of the one who set her free.

This woman has believed that God is forgiving, And so her love is great and her service sincere. She does not come to earn forgiveness by washing the feet of Jesus.

That is not why she is forgiven. Earning forgiveness is not why she has risked crashing that party. She had come to believe that God who knew more about her than those Pharisees loves and forgives her, and so her behavior reveals the joy and the love she has because of her faith.

What a powerful lesson she teaches us here in Luke's classroom. We act sometimes as though we do not believe that our sins are forgiven.

We let shame trouble our hearts, and guilt isolate us from the very one who calls us to believe leaving us to look more like Simon the Pharisee all concerned with how things look rather than letting joy and love move us to service.

She is moved by the love of God for her,

moved to the point of risking ridicule, scorn, and the disapproval of others moved to service of Jesus Christ moved to touch, kiss, and bathe. The issue here, the challenge, the question raised is the measure of our faith?

Is there enough faith in us for some extravagant display of love and service?

Enough faith to risk ridicule and disapproval
by our love for Christ shown in service?

Is there enough faith in any of you young people to risk doing something with your life that might make others laugh?

The truth of this Gospel is that we are all set free from shame and guilt. Our sins are forgiven yet we do not walk away from them because shame and guilt is sometimes preferable to service and love. It's easier to hide in shame than take the risk of coming to the feet of Jesus in gratitude. It's easier to stay in bed or go shopping than step through the doors of this church.

When the stares, the judgments, the name calling of others intimidates our fidelity, our generosity, and our service of anyone,
there is no faith, no hope, and no joy.

If we believe that our sins are forgiven by the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are going to be on our knees at this table where He still sits, and we'll be wiping the feet of those the society of Simon has refused to honor and respect with care. If Jesus has truly touched us, and we can see who is present in our midst, then no ridicule will keep us from loving and serving.

Audio Available

499
Ordinary Time 12
6/20/2010

Fr. Boyer

No Audio Available

500

Ordinary Time 13

6/27/2010

1 Kings 19:16-21 + Psalm 16+ Galatians 5: 1, 13-18 + Luke 9:51-62

Fr. Boyer

In Luke's Gospel there is almost always some journey taking place.

Think of that for a moment.

In the first chapter an angel is sent to a town of Galilee,
and Mary went into the hill country to visit Elizabeth.

In the second chapter Mary and Joseph go to be registered in Bethlehem,
and then they go to Jerusalem to present the child.

Just twenty verses later, they are going back to Jerusalem
with their twelve year old son for the Feast of Passover

where he has a significant moment in the Temple with the Elders.

This pattern continues right up this 9th chapter perhaps to prepare us for more.

The whole life of Jesus as Luke presents it is kind of Exodus,
an idea not lost on people of the Book.

It is a journey to the Father which Luke often describes as being "Taken up."

The Temple is always central and prominent.

It only takes Luke 8 verses to get us there with an angel's visit.

Zecharria is conducting his rituals there

when he experiences the presence of God

and the ultimate theme of Luke's Gospel unfolds: the Holy Spirit.

This is the whole purpose of the Gospel for Luke:

to get us to the Temple, into the presence of God, into the Spirit.

The Gospel of Luke ends where it begins: in the Temple.

After Pentecost it is the first meeting place of the disciples

and the place where Peter works his first miracle.

The "Peter" of Luke's Gospel is the Church.

We are those apostles today being led again to the Temple

to an experience of God's presence and into Pentecost of God's gifts and holiness.

Our lives are nothing more than a long journey to the new Jerusalem.

In the next several weeks as we move through the next ten chapters of Luke,

we shall be encouraged and instructed by the one who has made the journey before us.

Today the invitation is before us: Follow Me.

Today Luke addresses that which most easily distracts us and most frequently becomes our excuse. He
names obstacles that if left unaddressed will keep us from getting to Jerusalem.

They are not difficult to identify:

Prejudice like the Sadducees –

any hint of racism or prejudice

keeps us from completing the journey to the Temple.

It leads inevitably to a rejection of Jesus.

As long as there is anything in us like what we see with those Sadducees

we are not making the journey.

Revenge as we see in James and John –
as long as there is any desire to punish or take vengeance on another
for whatever reason, there will be no journey into the presence of God.
Feelings of or desire for revenge are REBUKED by Jesus.
That is the strongest Gospel language!

Nothing can challenge the central place of Christ
in the life of people on this journey.
Prior commitments offer no excuse.
Half-hearted volunteers who set conditions for this journey
are not going along to the Temple.
They look ahead, concentrate on the future
never looking behind out of nostalgia or to see how far they've come,
they just keep going forward once they set their feet to this journey.

Let's go people of Saint Mark.
Let's root out any prejudice or racism that lurks in our hearts.
Let's be finished with revenge and the anger that fuels it.
Let's stop making excuses for not living a holy and sacramental life
sustained by our weekly fellowship around this table
and our celebration of reconciliation.
Obligations to the silly things that crowd our calendars and daily lives;
that wear us out and leave us "too tired" as we often say in the face of
our obligation and duty to celebrate Sunday Mass will not do.
Let's go to the place where we are fed with all that we need to finish the journey
where we can stand free and sinless in the presence of God
where the Holy Spirit purifies and anoints us.
Miracles can and do happen in this Temple
where we are healed
where we can see presence of God
where we can hear the Word of the Lord.

Here, like Jesus who made it to Jerusalem;
we too shall be "taken up", lifted up, held up, and raised up.
Audio Available

501

Ordinary Time 14

7/4/2010

Isaiah 66: 10-13 + Psalm 66 + Galatians 6: 14-18 + Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20

Fr. Boyer

The Gospel for today is full of interesting details that could provide the seed for countless homilies and reflections.

We have all heard enough about the harvest and the laborers over simplifying this text into countless vocation homilies as though Jesus was talking about seminarians and priests! These instructions could leave us reflecting upon an appropriate life-style for the journey to the new Jerusalem, and the details could occupy a Bible Study class for a month with the cultural issues of this time in history. But mentioned twice in this passage is the seventy-two who are sent two-by-two ahead of him to every town and place he was about to visit.

Two times is enough to get my attention.

In an age and culture of individualism and consumerism where people are consumed like products imported from abroad, we are more and more marginalized when we take seriously and personally the message of peace. We live in a world that is becoming estranged from Christian values even though the latest round of political ads insist that this candidate or that is committed to values.

They never seem to tell what those values are beyond "family" values. Those same "value touting" politicians would be the first to make life more difficult for a single parent family increasing the cynicism and skepticism many of us have with talk about values. I always wonder: "Whose values?" The values of the Gospel are not easily confused, but they are very difficult to reconcile with the values of power and self-interest. Herein lies the challenge.

To remain Christian in more than name one must take a resolute stand against the commonly accepted axioms of this world.

Going with the flow, means going down the drain. Shrugging off injustice as though it's just the way things are is participation in the victory of that injustice. To become a true disciple requires a demanding course of induction into the adult Christian Community.

There is no facing the reality of life in this world with the faith of a twelve or sixteen year old.

Young people not challenged, instructed, and informed are sacrificed to the idols of hedonism, and the creeping consumerism of our culture will consume them. It's no wonder half of our young people are in bed this morning. Having learned nothing about their faith since First Communion Class they think this is all about them, what they can get out of it, and that somehow religion is a private matter.

There is nothing private about the Gospel.

There is nothing private about the Kingdom of God. The moment the Gospel is proclaimed, the moment the Gospel is understood we move into a relationship: not a private relationship with God, but into a communion of God's people. He sent them out two by two.

This was not for protection from violence and danger. It was because their credibility and their success rested upon their relationship and their working together. This will require that we continue work at developing a sense of solidarity held together by relationships with mature and exemplary Christians who represent Christ and his way of life. In this company and with this mission, Joy is unmistakable. Grim determination, dour isolation, and suspicious, tentative attitudes are not the consequences of discipleship with Jesus.

Now don't think that Jesus stood there counting out 72 individual people. That is not what Luke is saying. That number is biblical short-hand for everyone.

Don't think that Jesus waited till they were finished with their formation and passed all the tests of "disciple school". They are only half-way to Jerusalem, and he sent them out.

He does not wait till we are "ready". The sending comes along the way, not at the end.

The greatest challenge we face is not rejection or being laughed at. It is the risk of becoming grim, sour, cynical, defeated, and marginalized. The challenge is to let Joy in God permeate all we do and all we say. The prophet of the first reading today speaks to a people emerging from generations of exile. He challenges their sadness and their bad memories with the reality of God's forgiveness and the comfort of reconciliation.

When those disciples returned to Jesus, they were not whining about how hard it was.

They celebrated the fact that they could see the stranglehold of evil being lessened and they were a part of it first in their own lives, and then in the lives of those they visited. People will be attracted to Christ and to our way of life by our joy, not by rules, regulations, and grim sacrifices. Our giving is joyful, our sacrifice is a delight, our service is an act of love.

All along the way to Jerusalem, we are and will be cautioned, again and again, not to get, but to give. Not to save up, but to surrender. Not to load up, but to let go.

And when we do, we will arrive in Jerusalem rejoicing.

Audio Available

502

Ordinary Time 15

7/11/2010

Deuteronomy 30: 10-14 + Psalm 69 + Colossians 1: 15-20 + Luke 10: 25-37

Fr. Boyer

The culture and the society that is obsessed with boundaries and borders is in Gospel trouble, says this powerful parable we know only too well. The priest, the Levite, the Samaritan are all boundary bound. So conscious of, so careful of, so obsessed with boundaries, they have lost the most basic relationship, their neighbor. The fences and rules with which they have protected themselves have denied them the dignity with which they were created: "Good." That blessing, that affirmation bestowed upon us at creation goes now to someone else:

someone least expected, someone outside the boundaries created by God's own people!

In as much as parables always reveal something about God, we must listen carefully to this too familiar parable first for what it reveals about God, and then for clues about how we might begin to unwrap or restore

the image of God within us.

So first of all, it is God at work in this parable. It is God who is neither interested nor impressed by what race we were born to or who our parents are. God is impressed when God sees God's own character demonstrated in the life of one of God's own creatures.

This is what makes GOOD: being like God.

Only after examining what is revealed about God in a parable do we begin to question what it proposes to us. That is not difficult for those open to grace, conversion, and the continual challenge of the Gospel. So having confirmed from the parable that God is like this Samaritan, we are invited to take the next step and look at how much like or how unlike this Samaritan is our behavior and attitude. In other words: we might begin to wonder how "good" we are.

The "good" Samaritan is not "good" because he does a good deed. His goodness is not in stopping and picking up the victim. His goodness is found in the relationship he enters into. There is more than a good deed here – there is a commitment that is ongoing and lasting enough to be there when he returns. This is not just a passing act of charity – this is going further than just passing out a band aide The man is going to come back and make sure everything is ok.

He doesn't just expect the inn keeper to do take care of things – in a sort-of "Somebody should do something!" attitude. He accepts responsibility and in doing so a relationship is born. At that point, he becomes "good."

The question raised by the person who started this conversation with Jesus lingers on as the parable concludes; but it only lingers for those who make, set, and limit their lives, relationships, and responsibilities by boundaries, fences, and anything else that sets us enough apart from one another to even ask the question. For the serious follower of Christ, it is a silly trivial question that makes no sense.

That Samaritan was himself an outcast marginalized man living outside the mainstream of the Jewish society of that time.

Perhaps that is why he was so sensitive and responsive to someone else being avoided and ignored by those in the fast lane of life.

It seems to me that one who really seriously follows Christ

is often going to feel like an outcast or outsider,
marginalized and out of the mainstream
in this consuming materialistic culture in which we live.
That person will be the first to be sensitive and responsive
to the sufferings of others who are left behind, avoided, and pushed aside.

The parable speaks powerfully to us about God and goodness. It raises more serious questions than,
“Who is neighbor?” It proposes what it might be like for us to live together without the fences and
differences we devise so easily to keep others from getting what we have and absolve ourselves from
the relationships and responsibilities to which we are called by God who wants us to be good.

Audio Available

503

Ordinary Time 16

7/18/2010

Genesis 18: 1-10 + Psalm 15 + Colossians 1: 24-28 + Luke 10: 38-42

Fr. Boyer

Luke the great story teller gives us one of his best today. On he way to Jerusalem, there is a stop at Bethany. Perhaps there was an invitation extended. Perhaps it was just a casual stop unannounced. None the less in a home where he is welcome, there is Jesus who always draws a crowd. Suddenly it starts.

I can not image anyone in this church who has not been there. Imagine yourself in the car with your children. It's hot. It's a long day. And then an angry voice from the back seat says:

"He touched me!"

"Mom, make him stop!"

Imagine yourself in the house.

There are chores and it's time.

An angry young voice cries out:

"She won't help me!"

"I'm not picking up your stuff."

Imagine a few years later.

The teen ager has left a wet towel on the bathroom floor again.

You script by heart.

You are at work.

Something you need is not ready because someone else has not done their part of the project so everything comes to halt and you want to tell the boss, but you don't because you don't want the trouble.

So here we are at Bethany which could be anywhere, and a perfectly good evening comes apart when the two hosting the party get in a fight! Can you use your imagination a little more? I can. I do. First of all, I wonder where is the brother, Lazarus?

I have an idea that he saw it coming and was already out of there. He was probably tired of the two sisters bickering and was out with his buddies. It's a good thing God did not choose me to be Jesus in this story

because when the shout came from the kitchen: "Tell her to help me."

my response would not have been: "Mary has chosen the better part." I would have said: "Tell her yourself." "Leave me out of this."

Poor Jesus, caught in a triangle. If he didn't love this family so much, he probably would have hit the road. But he doesn't. He stays, and it probably worked out just fine because we know that he comes back at least one more time.

This wonderful story that is so human and so real to us speaks truthfully about us:

about our relationships and struggles to get along to share the work and share the space.

It speaks about our response to the presence of Christ and the demand to be hospitable.

It speaks about how we avoid confrontation;

about how we expect God in Christ to fix things between us when we do not speak to one another. It

speaks about how we take advantage of each other too; about how often we sit around and expect

someone else to take care of things and never lift a finger to help.

But Luke did not write a Gospel to tell us stories about family life. We already know that. There is nothing to be “revealed” in this Gospel about us. I do not think Luke told this story to reveal something about a family in Bethany or any family in Norman, Oklahoma. If this is Gospel, it is about Jesus Christ. In a somewhat tender and human story something about the divine is being revealed, and it is this for which we just listen.

Herein lies the secret of this story. In a strange sort of twist, the guest becomes the host. The one who comes to be fed ends up feeding the others. It happens all the time with Jesus. Remember that wedding in Cana?

It seemed that he was the guest, but he ends up being the host serving the best wine.

Think about that.

The truth of the matter is; we are the guests here invited by the Lord. He wants to feed us with his presence, His word, His Spirit, His flesh. The Gospel simply asks if we can sit down long enough to eat; or if we're too busy and have to eat and run, or maybe not accept the invitation at all today.

Audio Available

504

Ordinary Time 17

7/25/2010

Genesis 18: 20-32 + Psalm 138 + Colossians 2: 12-14 + Luke 11: 1-13

Fr. Boyer

Those who say: "Lord, teach us to pray." are not asking for a formula of words. A formula is useless if you do not know how and when to use it. Step into this scene that Luke gives us. The disciples have seen things they never dreamed of. They have seen this man, Jesus accomplish the unheard of. They have heard him open for them a future never dreamed of. They have seen him stand up to opposition and power without fear. They have heard him speak of justice, forgiveness, and love. They have also seen him pray and speak of his father.

They want that for themselves: not the power stuff, but the relationship, the courage the confidence, and the vision. They know that it comes from his relationship with his father. When they say: "Teach us to pray."

They want more than a formula of words.

They want to know the secret of prayer or how to pray successfully. Perhaps not so much to get what they want, but rather to be what they are called to become.

Jesus has been calling them to a life of discipleship, and he calls us as well.

That call would be frightening if we were to be in it alone. But he never asks that.

He sends them out two by two if you remember how this section of Luke's Gospel began.

There is a partnership essential to discipleship. There are no "Lone Rangers" among the disciples. The only one who saw himself that way was named, Judas.

This is hard to understand in a world of individuals. This is difficult to grasp in a world that prizes individualism and disposable relationships. The private, isolated individuals who live a world of singular pronouns like "me" and "I" never get it. Their world of possessions, protection, and hoarding does not enter into the mystery of prayer as Jesus teaches.

If you look closely at what he proposes,

you must notice that it is all about pronouns. It never escapes me that this prayer has no singular pronouns. The very first word is "OUR" and that puts us in relationship. There is a mutuality assumed in this prayer, and it is the mutuality of discipleship. There is no hint of personal piety suggested here. It is all communal and corporate prayer. This is the prayer of disciples. Disciples request it, and they are taught this prayer together. There is no "I", "Me" or "Mine" in this prayer, nor can there be such in the spiritual life and prayer of people formed on the way to Jerusalem.

This, my friends, is probably the one lesson about prayer that has never grown old in 2000 years. A relationship disposes us to prayer. A relationship expressed in the mutuality of these petitions. It is then a relationship that Jesus reveals here more than a verbal prayer, and he gives the disciples more than they asked for.

This prayer is never better said, offered, and spoken than when it is prayed together – in your homes, and in this sacred space.

This prayer is never more effective than when it draws us together as different religious traditions, as different people, as different families. Spoken alone, it is a promise of what is to come in the

communion of saints, and the private longing we have to never be alone. Spoken together it is the realization of what Jesus has come to fulfill; the unity, the reconciliation, the peace and promise of the Kingdom that has come by his presence.

In ancient times, the words of this prayer were never shared with anyone not trusted and known to be followers of Christ. Catechumens were not taught this prayer until late in their formation, for the handing over of these words and this tradition was a sign of a deep and serious relationship as well as the mark of one who was to be known as a member of the family.

It is not by chance or accident that we shall soon offer this prayer together beginning the Communion part of the Mass.

Never more powerfully does this prayer accomplish what Jesus offered and what the disciples asked for than when it brings us to communion with one another and with the living, loving, God.

Audio Available

505

Ordinary Time 18

8/1/2010

Ecclesiastes 1: 2; 21-23 + Psalm 90 + Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11 + Luke 12: 13-21

Fr. Boyer

Here we are again.

“Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.”

Were you here two weeks ago when Martha came out of the kitchen saying: “Lord, tell her to help me!”

This is beginning to look like one of Luke’s literary devices

setting us up for the message to come.

Perhaps it is the voice of Luke

who wants Jesus to speak to the community in which he serves.

Perhaps it is the voice of a pastor who wants the community he serves

to hear and respond to the Gospel.

Either way the parable, found only in Luke, speaks clearly and plainly to us today.

It is not the only parable in Luke’s gospel

that reveals a community that included both the rich and the poor.

This disparity was a concern for Luke,

and with love he addresses the issue and its special challenge to the community.

With frightening consistency we all live with a message

playing in the back our minds: “It can’t happen to me.”

Our children take dangerous chances with drugs, sex, and fast cars,
because they think, “It can’t happen to me.”

Where does that thinking come from?

Perhaps a little of it simply comes from being young

and the dream of a long and full life;

but I think a lot of it comes from the adults around them

who live the same way;

perhaps not with drugs, sex, and fast cars,

but in a life style that has separated them from

the reality of death first of all,

and the reality of life around them as well.

That reality can be reduced to a fact that is not refutable:

we are 4.7% of the world’s population

yet we control for ourselves 60% of the world’s resources.

The drug trade alone that continues to destabilize this continent from the south

is for use in this country.

We want the drug traffic stopped,

but never ask who is taking the drugs and who profits from their sale.

All the while we live as though there is never going to be a time to be accountable.

Bernie Madoff was a respectable, admired, white American.

If we do not listen to this parable and let it motivate and guide our judgments, Bernie Madoff is us living
as though it’s all ok as long as you don’t get caught,

or in the style of this parable; as long as you don’t die.

But we do die, and we do we get caught.

We are challenged by Jesus in this parable to consider who is going to get all the stuff we have piled into our garages, homes, and storage facilities. He is not suggesting that we get a good lawyer to write up a Will or Trust document. He is asking simply how much do really we need, and when you have more than you need why do you keep it at all? He is asking us to wonder why we have these things, and what it is we are supposed to do with what we have.

Beneath all of this lies an even bigger question: are we so badly in denial that we have forgotten that we will, everyone of us, be suddenly separated from this stuff leaving it behind?

There is danger for us followers of Christ in this world today. The danger is called “denial” and it shows itself in a lifestyle that assumes whoever has the most stuff wins, anything goes as long as you don’t get caught, and it can’t happen to me.

The man in this parable is called a “fool” because he is. He talks to himself all the time, did you notice that? We never him talking to his neighbors. We never him talking to God. He just talks to himself probably because he is so isolated and so alone. He is probably so isolated from others that he can’t see them or their needs, and he is so busy building his bigger house and barn that he doesn’t notice.

This must not become our story. I remember very clearly once when I was a child our pastor said: “You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.” My father often repeated that to us at home and I’ll pass that wisdom on to you with all the love and hope that Luke, the pastor, wrote this parable to his church. There is no denial that we have a lot, and that we have most of what there is. Only a fool would fail to wonder and ask why and what should we do with it. Audio Available

506

Ordinary Time 19

8/7/2010

Wisdom 18: 6-9 + Psalm 33 + Hebrews 11: 1, 2, 8-12

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

507

Ordinary Time 19

8/8/2010

Wisdom 18: 6-9 + Psalm 33 + Hebrews 11: 1, 2, 8-12

Fr. Boyer

I find myself thinking of and listening to this Gospel with two Gospel stories we had last month still in my mind. There was Martha standing there with apron pulled tight and hands on hips saying to Jesus:

“Make her help me!”

Then last week someone from the crowd comes up to Jesus and says: “Tell my brother to give me my share.”

I was thinking of those stories with this Gospel passage because here is this community of Luke, 50 or so years after the death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit hanging around expecting Jesus to fix things.

They are standing around wondering what’s going on? And thinking: “Come on Jesus!

Get back here and bring that Kingdom you promised!”

That “Jesus Fix It” mentality seems to be spreading. That idea that someone else should take care of what’s bothering us

is not going away. I suspect that Luke writes these verses to speak to that attitude

and remind us that Jesus did not come to fix anything except our relationships with one another and with his Father. I believe that what Luke would have us see is that our waiting around impatiently and sometimes with doubt about the coming of Christ and the Kingdom is somehow not quite right.

The Kingdom and all its glory, peace, and justice does not come because we think that someone else should make it happen. The Jesus of Luke’s Gospel is a Jesus who was a Teacher. He was and perhaps as long as we tell the stories still teaching us how to live: not live in the future, but how to live now in the Kingdom of God. Perhaps if we did so, we would discover that the Kingdom of God is already among us, available and possible at which point all our fears would be in vain.

“Do not fear, little flock.” is advice given to people of faith – to people who have been given the Kingdom of God. Read the text.

Jesus is speaking in the present: “Your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom of God.” Then the teacher instructs the disciples on how to live in that Kingdom.

“Sell what you have and give alms.” Live today as though it were your last. Live everyday that way, and watch what happens.

All the things you put off doing and resolving will be finished. Those little things, the little touches that make a life beautiful and ought to finish a good life get completed. You express your thanks and your love to the ones you have taken for granted today not thinking I’ll tell them tomorrow. You find healing and forgiveness now because you don’t want to die without making amends to those you have slighted, hurt, and refused. You quit hoarding all the stuff you have piled up and give it away not with worry about who deserves it, but to those who need it. Suddenly, Justice and Charity are all you think about and care about.

In other words, if we would simply begin now to live in the Kingdom the way we have been taught by the Rabbi, we would have nothing to wait for and there would be no long delay.

Perhaps we would begin to understand what happened at Pentecost and begin to do what we have

been called and sent to do: bring the kingdom of God and stop waiting for someone else to do what we have been asked and gifted and prepared to do.

Audio Available

508

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

8/15/2010

Revelation 11: 19; 12 1-6 + Psalm 45 + 1 Corinthians 15: 20-27 + Luke 1: 39-56

Fr. Boyer

In the words of greeting Elizabeth speaks to Mary there are two expressions of praise: one for the child she carries by God's graciousness and the other for Mary because of her ability to believe that what God has spoken would be fulfilled.

Later, as an adult, Jesus will praise the same ability when a woman in some crowd calls out, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." To which Jesus replies: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." The greatness of this woman is not simply found in the physical side of her motherhood. Her ability to hear the Word of God and obey it is greater, and in that, she becomes the perfect disciple and model for us all.

The combination of God's action and human cooperation is what we must see and embrace with this great feast. God acts. The disciple hears and obeys. In Luke's Gospel both Elizabeth and Jesus praise Mary

because she heard the word of God and kept it. It defines who Mary is, and what we must become. It is our vocation to be hearers and doers of the Word of God.

There is a problem here for us; a great challenge. Hearing the Word of God for Mary is portrayed as a face-to-face encounter. An angel spoke. For us it is not so easy. There are many voices clamoring for our hearing. Which one is the Word of God?

To discern that Word requires first of all a conviction that someone is speaking; and we are in the process of listening. We do not do much of that these days in the lives we lead. Listening is skill many do not practice. It even shows itself in here.

Rather than listen some want to text, some one to read. Reading and Listening are not the same. We are involved and engaged in a profound experience in our faith, because the divine and holy one is trying to communicate to us; and the speaking can be thought of as the divine desire to be one, to turn all things into love, to right wrongs, establish justice, and to restore beauty to all creation. It is a call to love, to justice, to beauty.

As we seek to discern what God is saying, what is asking of us, we cannot be fighting for our way or imposing our will upon others

or upon situations that are complex and difficult. Our best hope is to pay attention to the woman we honor today; a woman who emerges as a person of openness and humility, a person who questions with courage, consults, perseveres and looks for justice.

The only way God's plan becomes clear is by living it this way.

Today we Catholic followers of Christ affirm with this feast that the fullness of the human person is destined to live on in God.

That whatever it is that makes up a human person is not lost in death for those who hear the Word of God obey it, live it, and risk it. We are capable of living in communion with divine life. Like Mary, if we choose to listen and obey, we may have human origins, but we have a divine destiny.

Because God has taken the initiative with power and fidelity and mercy, love will triumph and justice will prevail. Not in some far off time or some eternal home;
but here when we seek the beauty of creation in every human life. Nothing is impossible with God.
Audio Available

509

Ordinary Time 21

8/22/2010

Isaiah 66: 18-21 + Psalm 117 + Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13 + Luke 13: 22-30

Fr. Boyer

Insiders and Outsiders. Who is in and who is out. Who belongs and who does not. This kind of thinking is part of our lives now just as it was when Luke wrote his Gospel exploring the relationship between Gentiles and Jews.

We have our gated communities, our neighborhood covenants, our private schools, our country clubs, and our health clubs.

We have our homeland security, boarder patrol, birth certificates, passports, and government issued ID cards; all to determine who is in and who is out.

We cannot look at this gospel as though it is about the past or wonder what those people were thinking with that question

about who gets to heaven and who does not.

There is something else going on here. It seems to me that there is some kind of disconnect in our thinking between how we behave and what we expect here what is to come when this life ends. My first suspicion is that not many people even think about what is to come. Thoughts and concerns about death, judgment, heaven and hell are out of style. So, we just skip merrily along in high denial about a future. Or we so drug ourselves on the image of a merciful and loving God (which we often fail to imitate) and so never think that the future might be like the present. There might actually be a gate; credentials to present in order to get in.

We live in political and social systems today that work like this: you can get whatever you want and whatever you need

if you know the right people or have enough cash. Today's Gospel says: NOT SO.

I believe that the question in this gospel was asked for the sake of reassurance.

"Here I am, Jesus. I am one of your followers listening to you today. Tell me I'm going to get into this Kingdom you are talking about." The answer was not what that person wanted to hear. I would bet that the person who asked the question was gone the next day. Those following Jesus remind him: "You taught in our streets." To them Jesus says: "And all you did was listen." He says: "You never took my teachings to heart and changed anything in your lives. You think that a passing acquaintance with me is enough and being able to quote my words is all it takes." NOT SO.

The question about how many will be saved is silly. It avoids the first question about whether I will be saved. Jesus rejects the first question and focuses on the question of the struggle. He says: "Forget about how many; put your mind and heart into the disciplined work of striving to enter."

STRIVING is the issue. It is a life-long project, a discipline, a way of life that must influence everything we do, think, say, and believe. The way to the Kingdom of God is the way of self discipline. That is the discipline the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of today. There is a set of virtues and values, a style of behavior that must be followed if salvation is to be realized.

They are difficult, and they require a great deal of effort. Patience, persistence, forgiveness, humility and a host of others

that do not spring automatically from our personalities. They take practice, over and over, and sometimes painfully. If discipline is to have meaning and be redemptive, it must be self-discipline. The

redemptive value of discipline must come from within.

Pain and Suffering do nothing outside of us.

Suffering is never explained by asking where it comes from or why does God allow this?

That is all outside thinking. What we must ask is: "What do I do with this suffering?"

At that point it is internalized and becomes a self-discipline that redeems and saves.

So what do we do with this Gospel? Is coming to Mass today going to get us to heaven? No it isn't. Is listening to the Word of God, accepting Jesus as my savior, going to confession, receiving communion going to get us through the narrow door? No it isn't.

Repentance because we have internalized the Word of God and with reflection and discipline, begun to question everything we do in terms of whether or not it will gain us eternal life will move us toward that narrow door. That is striving.

Breaking our lives like this broken bread and broken body of Christ in service

of someone else is striving toward the narrow door. Entering into the mystery of suffering by asking "What do I do with this"

rather than whining and complaining is striving.

The free gift of salvation accepted is realized only by those who have seen it's beauty and its value and begun to make themselves worthy of it by striving toward the goal, not by sitting around waiting, and then rushing forward at the last minute.

Audio Available

510

Ordinary Time 22

8/29/2010

Sir 3:17-29 + Ps 68:4-11 + Heb 12:18-24 + Lk 14:1-14

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

511

Ordinary Time 24

9/12/2010

Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14 + Psalm 51 + 1 Timothy 1: 12-17 + Luke 15: 1-32

Fr. Boyer

Three parables are told in response to Scribes and Pharisees who have criticized Jesus for eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners. In that culture there were only two groups: those who were in and those who were out. Scribes and Pharisees of course were in.

Tax Collectors and Sinners were out. Jesus proposes that a third group would be more in keeping with the Kingdom of God: those who gather in unity to rejoice.

These three parables seem to build upon one another in intensity and importance. The first is about a lost sheep, an animal. The second is about a lost coin. Now this is not just any coin. Such a huge search effort would not be likely for one coin out of ten.

Scholars suggest that this coin might have been part of the dowry which would carry much greater significance than monetary value.

The third parable is about a lost human being, a son.

Now parables always reveal something about God. In every parable Jesus reveals something about the "Father." I doubt that the Jesus of the Gospels thought much about who was in and who was out. He ate with everyone. He ate in the homes of a Pharisees who were not always perfect hosts. He ate at Matthew the tax collector's home, and he shared a drink with a Samaritan woman of questionable reputation. The "in" and the "out" groups were not of interest to him.

What was of interest was bringing them together. No matter what kept people apart, sickness, social status, territorial boundaries, tribal identity, or language as we see later when His spirit comes on Pentecost, it had to go.

The will of the Father was unity: unity in Israel, unity in the family. And we tell this story today because the will of the Father is not yet accomplished. The work of Jesus in bringing us together is not complete and there is no one left to complete it but you and me. In the last of the three parables, that reality is made obvious by the older son. The Pharisees and Scribes got the point. That older son was them. It made them mad, and rather than see into the story the Will of God for them, they only became angrier leaving those who thought of themselves as "insiders" on the outside while the party begins. The story has no conclusion because it isn't over yet – there is still time to complete the Will of the Father for which we pray every time we utter those words that Jesus left us.

Finding what was lost, reuniting whatever is separated, restoring what ever and who ever are lost to the family of God is the Will of the Father. In God's eyes there is neither "in group" nor "out group". That is our doing, and it has no place in the family of God. The Will of God is a celebration – a party – call it "heaven" if you wish, Paradise, or a wedding banquet, for what else is a wedding but the unification of two people or two families into one. In the years since these parables first revealed the Will of God, we have not made much progress in restoring what is separated and broken. What progress we make will be measured by our willingness and desire to celebrate. Continuing to insist that some are worthy and some are not, that some belong and some do not is a long way from the celebration. A desire and movement toward reconciliation is the first step toward the party. A waiting willingness and hope that will not die is the next. Seeking and never giving up is part of the disciple's work.

This Eucharistic assembly is a taste of that celebration to come, but everyone is not here, and some are not here because we did not look for them. Some are not here because we have hurt them. Some are not here because they never knew we missed them. Nonetheless, the Father still stands and waits; some still seek and search for the lost. We may not be content with the way things are in this world while we threaten to burn one another's sacred books build walls and fences to keep people apart pass laws about language, and continue to polarize even our own nation with ideologies that favor one group over another rather than seek the common good. In this condition, it is even hard to hear the sound of the party over the cries of those who are left out. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Audio Available

512

Ordinary Time 25

9/19/2010

Amos 8: 4-7 + Psalm 113 + 1 timothy 2: 1-8 + Luke 16: 1-13

Fr. Boyer

If we were reading chapter 15 and 16 together, two connecting ideas would pull together this parable and one from last week.

But we don't hear that so easily with seven days in between so let me point them out to you. In both parables, the verb "squander" is used. Wasteful and extravagant behavior is seen in both the younger of two sons and then again in this steward. Then, both the squandering son and the squandering servant have moments of clarity when they come to their senses and ask the same question:

"What shall I do?"

In a nation and at a time in history when "squandering" has become a national pastime, almost an art, and even the subject of entertainment made perfectly obvious by a television show called: "Greed"; this parable might be a bit timely. Say the word: "Squander" these days, and all kinds of people are going to start hollering about "Washington." It's today's great political game: blame someone else, accuse them of squandering. If they would stop it everything would be fine. It is a really effective diversion, perfectly distracting.

If I keep attention on someone else's squandering, no one will notice my own.

If I can convince myself that squandering in Washington is the problem, no one will ever notice what I'm doing, and neither will I.

This is a tough parable if you take it personally. Of course, if you hear it and think it's about someone else, it is a lot easier. But it isn't about someone else. It is about a Steward; and that point, the parable is about us, because stewards is what we are.

Whether we are one of the two sons from last week: the older who is in a great snit because he thinks his privilege is being lost or the younger who squanders what he has no right to possess or this steward who squanders what he has been asked to manage, there is no getting away from the big question: What am I to do? Unless you just turn this into a Bible Study course and fiddle around with the many odd little details we have to ask that question. What shall I do? is the question this Gospel puts in our face. What shall I do with all the stuff I have? What shall I do with the time that I have? What shall I do with the opportunities I have? What shall I do with the life I have?

Jesus is inviting us to a radical change of outlook. He is not urging us to be service-oriented people out to help others. Boy Scouts and the Rotary Club can teach you that. You don't need to learn that in church.

Jesus is not counseling unselfishness or service as a way to be happy. Doing things for others because it makes us feel good is sick business that never address the cause of another's need. It always feels good to throw some money at a cause or a problem

but that never addresses the cause of the problem and so it's always there. It never feels good to deal with the cause of the problem, because that might mean some change in our own behavior or our values. It feels good to build a house for a poor person. It does not feel good to change the comfortable system that keeps them poor.

This is where the 16th Chapter of Luke's Gospel comes alive. Jesus proposes that we look at everything we have in a radically new way; to see every skill, talent, opportunity and possession as something given to us to manage, to use, to invest for one single purpose: the forging of an unbreakable bond between ourselves, God and other people. What lasts, Jesus suggests is people. When there is no more work because you're too old; or no more money because you've squandered it all there will still be people around us. This is the wisdom of the steward in this parable. It's not that he is buying friends, but that he knows what will last. He is asking the question: "What will my life be like in the future?" His response is to build up relationships because he knows that those relationships are a greater prize than all the master's wealth. To be a disciple of Jesus we must renounce all use of material goods that does not have God and love of others as its goal. We must dedicate ourselves to serving others in everything we do.

Ask the question: "What shall I do?"

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Audio Available

Amos: 1, 4-7 + Psalm 146 + 1 Timothy 6: 11-16 + Luke 16: 19-31

Fr. Boyer

The idea has come to me that four Gospels is not enough, and I have decided to join the Evangelist team and write up a fifth one. It probably will not make the cut-off and ever be included in anyone's Bible; but I think that if I write the stories correctly I won't have to preach any more, so after Byron is finished proclaiming the new Gospel, we can just go right on with the Creed and you'll be out of here about fifteen minutes faster. Does anyone object to that?

After giving this idea some thought during the week, I decided to start with this story, and fill in the others later. Now Byron, the rules say that if you are present, I can not read the Gospel; but since this is not Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, you are excused. There is already a Gospel of Thomas not accepted, so we will have to call this the Gospel of September. Somewhere in the middle this story will come up.

"Jesus said to the good people of Norman: There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen imported from Italy. (First I wrote down crimson and cream but then I scratched that out purple and linen as a nice ring to it.) He dined on the finest of cuisine every day and his wine choices rivaled the greatest cellars. He dined alone because he liked it that way. Outside on the front porch was a poor man named Lazarus covered with sores. Lazarus would gladly have eaten the left-over food, but the door was always closed. It was always closed because the rich man was afraid of Lazarus. He was afraid Lazarus might mess up the place or take some of his stuff. Dogs came and licked the sores on Lazarus. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels straight on to the banquet in heaven. When the rich man died the undertaker took him away (no angels). He was dumped on the front porch of heaven while his children hatefully fought each other over his estate. Thinking he would live much longer, and putting off everything important, he had no will. Then the dogs came, and they bit him and tore his fine garments to rags.

"He shouted out for help, but the door was closed just the way he liked it, and no one heard him for a long time. Finally Abraham came out to welcome some other guests, and the rich man said: "Father Abraham, I'm miserable and hungry out here. Let me in. But Abraham just looked the other way closing the door just as the rich man closed his door. Again Father Abraham came out to welcome other guests, and the rich man said: "If I can't come in, send Lazarus out to tell my family to stop fighting over that stuff and come help me." Abraham said: "It won't do any good, they have the door closed, and they are too busy eating everything they can find and spending all your money.

"No, Father Abraham" the rich man said: "If Lazarus goes back, they will listen." But Father Abraham said: "Now look here, what makes you think they are going to open the door with Lazarus back there again when you wouldn't open before." They learned to keep the door closed. Now they are enjoying all that stuff you left behind. When it's gone, that's all there is. The rich man whined and said: "I want to come in, I never did anything wrong in my whole. I earned my money honestly and worked hard for it."

"I know you never did anything bad," said Abraham, "but the trouble is, and the reason you're outside here by yourself is that you never did anything good. You just stayed home, protected your stuff and enjoyed the best of everything. The problem with you sir is that you simply did nothing. You were complacent, comfortable, and took care of yourself. You kept the door closed so you would not have to

see Lazarus although you seem to know his name which is curious to me.

“You went to church and you listened to the Gospel. You talked about and studied about Jesus who rose from the dead, but you never imitated his behavior and never made his attitude and his concerns your own, much less did you do what he asked you to do. You knew you were created in the image and likeness of God, but you only got it half right. The God who made you is very rich. You imitated that part right perfectly. But that same God gave you his riches. Somehow you missed that part and failed to live in the full image of that God. You heard the Prophet Amos speaking to you and reminding you that your complacent attitude was not right. Even though you were not hateful or hostile, you were complacent and that was worse. You just kept thinking: “Someone ought to do something about that man Lazarus.” It was nice of you to let him sleep on your front porch as long as the door was closed, but you never asked why he was sleeping there in the first place. You did him no harm, but you did him no good either.”

At that point, Abraham heard the guests gathering for desert, so he got up waved goodbye to the rich man and left him sitting on the porch as the dogs came growling again at this stranger. Abraham closed the door.

The Gospel of September.
Audio Available

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:24 + Psalm 95 + 2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14 + Luke 17: 5-10

Fr. Boyer

This past week while in Nebraska with the priests of Grand Island, I worked on that new Gospel I was telling you about last week. I have not quite made up my mind about the title, but I am beginning to think it might be the "Gospel according to Norman." You might remember that the other four gospels did not get divided into chapters and verses for quite some time after they were in written form, so this new one has no chapter and verses either, but I'll just read you another section of it as I did last weekend.

Jesus has just been talking about sin and forgiveness. He was telling them that no matter what another person does, if they say they are sorry, you can't refuse to forgive. If another person abandons you, betrays you, lies about you, steals from you and then apologizes, you can't refuse forgiveness; even if they do the same thing several times. To this, the apostles cry out: "This is impossible, we can't do it."

So the Gospel of Norman for today starts up at this point.

The apostles are whining among themselves: "We can't do this. It is impossible to live like this. You're asking more than we can do." So Jesus stops walking toward Jerusalem where he knows he is going to be asked by His father to do more than he thinks he can do. He sits down on the curb and says: "You guys always think everything is about size and power. You keep thinking that if you are the biggest, then you will be best. You think that if you are the strongest you can do anything. You keep thinking that if you have the highest score, you are a "winner"; and everyone is going to admire you. But you have it all wrong. You always want more of everything and instead of looking at what you have and using it for what you need, you keep looking at what you do not have, and then you whine and complain that you don't have more.

It does not work this way in the Father's Kingdom to which I have invited you.

It's like this: you are home folding laundry and feeling sorry for yourself that you have to fold the laundry and do all that wash for those kids and your husband who just sits around watching football, but you never think about how wonderful it is that you have laundry to fold and that whole healthy family who loves you and depends upon you. Or you sit there watching that game wishing you had a bigger flat screen or a better job so you could hire someone to do the laundry your wife is folding all the while forgetting that some people are working hard today to keep the electricity on so you can sit there. Never mind just being grateful that you have a job at all these days. Or it's the weekend and you start thinking about Mass and hope you'll over sleep. Or you're out of town and think it's too complicated to find another Catholic church so you just skip it; because after all you went last week. If you get to church with your parents and have not made them mad on the way, you just sit there thinking about when you get older you won't be here. You forget that this is all about gratitude and thanking God for what you have and praising God for what you have received and listening to God's Word that calls you to be loyal, faithful, and grow holy. You whine that you don't get anything out of it which is true because you just sit there doing nothing thinking that doing nothing makes you worthy of getting more.

"You see my friends," says Jesus to his followers, "You already have all that you need to be forgiving, generous, grateful, kind, thoughtful, and gracious." Those things are what make you good, admirable, loveable, and holy. It does not make any difference if someone sins and does not stop. That only keeps

them out of my Father's house. You can still forgive whether they stop or not, and forgiveness is what the Father asks. You can be generous even if people are not grateful. Their ingratitude should not affect your generosity.

"Get the point here." Jesus says. "You are not going to get extra credit for just doing the minimum. There is no prize for whining, and no special favors for those who just do what is expected. What the Father asks of me in Jerusalem is more than I think I can do; but wait and see what happens if I obey the Father's Will. It must be the same with you. You already have all that you need. Just work with what you have and awesome things will happen. You will be great not because you are better than someone else; but because you have realized who you are in God's sight and you have stopped waiting around asking for more and begun living and working with what you already have."

Then Jesus got up, turned his face toward Jerusalem and started walking again; and the apostles began to realize what it meant to be a disciple, so they followed him all the way to Jerusalem.

Audio Available

515

Ordinary Time 28

10/10/2010

2 Kgs 5:14-17 + Ps 98:1-4 + 2 Tm 2:8-13 + Lk 17:11-19

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

516

Ordinary Time 28

10/10/2010

2 Kgs 5:14-17 + Ps 98:1-4 + 2 Tm 2:8-13 + Lk 17:11-19

Fr. Boyer

The Gospel of Norman continues again this week.

“Jesus was still on the way to Jerusalem, and he decided to pass between Samaria and Galilee since going through Samaria would have brought some hostility because he was headed to Jerusalem; and passing through Galilee would have slowed the journey since he was too well known there. It was a risky decision since this area was a kind of “no-man’s land” and there was no telling what might happen. Sure enough, as he came near a village, a group of Ten Lepers shouted out to him: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” How they knew his name is still a point for discussion in Bible Study groups, but they did call him by name, and they seemed to know more than his name.”

Now we have to remember, that in Bible - talk, “Ten” is a nice round number, perfectly in balance, and when Bible-writers use that number it suggests a sense of completion and perfection.

“Hearing their call, Jesus shouted back, “Go do what the law requires. Show yourself to the priest and he will decide if you are cleansed and healed enough to go back home.” So the ten took off running ahead of Jesus toward the Priests in Jerusalem. They didn’t get very far before they noticed something. Their sores were healing, their joints were straightening, and they felt a lot better. Stopping to examine each other, they began to notice something they had not noticed before when they were all sick. They noticed that one of them was a Samaritan. When they were sick they never noticed that nine were Jews and one was a Samaritan. In their sickness and isolation, the difference did not matter. Now that they were well, things changed. The Samaritan said: “I’m going back to thank the Master.” The others said: “You should go back. You’re a Samaritan and had no right to his favor and to his power. We are Jews like him, even though he is from Galilee. He owed it to us. We deserve his favors since we’re one of his own.” So the nine went on to Jerusalem while the Samaritan turned around. He would not have been welcome in Jerusalem anyway.

He found Jesus still walking toward Jerusalem and fell down on the ground in front of him thanking Jesus over and over again. Jesus was surprised to see this Samaritan in front of him, especially after all the trouble Jesus has had with Samaritans on the journey. But Jesus said:

“Where are the others?” Is only this Samaritan here to express his gratitude? No Samaritan is ever nice to us.” And with that, the Samaritan felt embarrassed and just said ‘Thank you.’ again.

Jesus looked at him and said: “I have something better for you than for them. For the moment they are pleased and satisfied because they got what they wanted and only what they deserved. For you I have something better. From now on and for all eternity, you are saved and will have place in my Father’s Kingdom. Your faith has saved you. Your faith has given you more than you had a right to expect and more event than you asked for. For them I have nothing more.”

Then Jesus turned and stared walking toward Jerusalem. Now that they were disease free and perfectly like everyone else, the nine were back in Jerusalem very busy making sure that no Samaritans got in or had a share in what they had earned, never even thinking that in spite of being cured from leprosy they would still die of something else and never know that eternal life would have been their’s had they just

taken the time to turn around and go back to honor and give thanks to Jesus.
No Audio Available

517

Ordinary Time 29

10/17/2010

Exodus 17: 8-13 + Psalm 121 + 2 Timothy 3: 14-4:2 + Luke 18: 1-8

Fr. Boyer

I did not have time this week to work on my new Gospel, and since these verses today and this parable are found only in Luke's Gospel, I'm not sure it's going end up in the Gospel of Norman. I need to speak about something else today, but before I do, I am anxious to remind you of a couple of things that are important for understanding parables:

- 1) They are about the Kingdom of God and God is the point of parables.
- 2) They nearly always tell a story that twists reality around creating contradictions and revealing something about God and the Kingdom of God.

With that in mind only a most shallow hearing of this parable would lead you to think that it is about prayer or persistence. Leave that alone. Go deeper.

The last line of today's reading should shift us out of that thinking and suggest that somehow this parable is about justice and faith.

Remember that in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel Mary goes to Elizabeth and there she proclaims what we call the Magnificat – a hymn of praise and thanksgiving that in Luke's Gospel outlines what is to come.

One of the lines in the Magnificat says: "He will cast down the mighty from their thrones and lift up the lowly." That expectation is what is being addressed in this parable. The powerful, almighty judge is being undone by a helpless lowly widow. The parable is being used and told to encourage and hold up the confidence of those who are tired and weary from waiting for what the Messiah's coming had promised. For the Lukan church, it's been a long wait for Christ's return, and they are getting tired, confused, and discouraged.

The Kingdom of God is going to bring about a great reversal of fortunes and roles. This parable story is about the conflict between the powerful and the powerless.

It is about how the powerless will prevail if they hold on to faith and live in hope.

This parable speaks about Justice and it suggests to people of faith that Justice is their greatest need, and the lack of it is the greatest obstacle to the coming of God's reign. In other words, if you want the Kingdom of God you had better work for Justice, and if you do, anything in the way will give way. Both figures break the mold for their times. Judges are expected to act like God according to the Old Testament. Widows are expected to be quiet and stay out of the way. What we get her is another switch in the characters that can lead us to expect and believe that the way things are these days is not the way they are going to be in the future, and is not the way God intends.

When the Son of Man Comes what is he going to find is the question the parable raises?

Things the way they are with the powerful protecting themselves and their comfortable ways?

Or will the weak and powerless because they have not given up and accepted helplessly their unjust fate prevailed upon their opponents to grow more like God.

Whichever of these two characters describes us, we certainly need to remember that it is not a matter of "if" the Son of Man returns, but "when."

Audio Available

518

Ordinary Time 30

10/24/2010

Sirach 35: 12-14 + Psalm 34 + 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18 + Luke 18: 9-14

Fr. Boyer

Last week I reminded you that a wonderful way to move more deeply into the message of Luke's Gospel is to remember the Magnificat. Those words which Luke has Mary speak as she arrives at Elizabeth's announce what has begun to happen not just to her, but to all creation through the mystery of the Incarnation. Let's do that today before I read you another installment of the Gospel of Norman. Please pick up the hymnal and turn to page: 22. (All read the Magnificat aloud)

With that in mind then, here is a new section from the Gospel of Norman.

"Jesus spoke this parable to those who thought they deserved heaven because they were so good.

Two people came to the church to pray.

One was a really good person who never missed Mass, contributed to every collection, and came to a lot of meetings.

The other was a single parent who had two jobs, belonged to a minority group, and lived in a little apartment.

The really good person came up by the tabernacle for prayer, and without listening too hard, anyone else in the church could overhear the prayer.

Thank you God that I have so many blessings to leave to my children. I have worked hard and saved my money. I have a nice home and pay my taxes, even though they are too high and too much of it gets wasted on those who do not deserve it. I bought a nice car that I use to take my children everywhere they want to go, and I bring them to Mass when we're not too tired. I give my hard-earned money to charities when I have little extra. I fast twice a year just as the church asks. I am so thankful that I am not like those others who sit around all day doing nothing and wanting food stamps, or like those people who keep moving in here and don't speak English. Thank you for my good health and the doctors I see so regularly. I do my best to stay healthy and get the gym four times a week. I try to be good, and keep the commandments.

Meanwhile in the back of the church sitting down because they were so tired, another person came in to pray. It was hard to hear much of what they said, but it went something like this.

God, have mercy on me. You continue to help me even though I do not deserve anything you have provided for me. You have not abandoned me even when I have cheated and lied. You are always with me even when I am unfaithful and undependable. You are generous and kind when I am selfish and take more than I need. You are patient and wait for me when I avoid confession and fail to acknowledge my need for you and my dependence upon your love.

Then Jesus said: I tell you most sincerely and truthfully: the person in the back of the church went home justified, forgiven, and blessed by my heavenly Father but not the one in the front of the church. For you see, the prayer of the one in front was all about him: what he had done, what he had, and how well he deserved it all. While the prayer of the person in the back was all about God and acknowledged God's love knowing very well that they deserved nothing. Yet what little they had was used for God not for themselves or their glory.

Then looking around to all who were astonished at this parable Jesus said: It is not enough to simply do

what is asked, keep the rules and do no more. It is not enough to try and be good, keep the commandments and not hurt anyone. To those who have been given much, even more will be expected. It is not enough to be grateful. You are expected to imitate the graciousness of the one who gave to you without considering who deserves and who does not. It is never right to justify yourself by comparison to another. If you want to compare yourself to someone, compare yourself to your creator. Then you will find that you can never justify yourself to begin with because justification is simply one more gift God has for humble and simple servants like His Son.

The Gospel of Norman!

Audio Available

519
Ordinary Time 31
10/31/2010

Dcn. Jacobson

Audio Available

520

Solemnity of All Saints

11/1/2010

Revelation 7: 2-4, 9-14 + Psalm 24 + 1 John 3: 1-3 + Matthew 5: 1-12

Fr. Boyer

About a week ago I received an email from someone in another parish where I have served. In the message, she said that she never celebrates All Saints Day without remembering the year I had called all the children up around the altar for the homily and asked them what they had to do to become a Saint. A little hand went up boldly, and the child said: "You have to be dead." and with that the sermon fell apart.

I have learned a lot since those days in the 70s, and I want you to notice that today there are no children around the altar, and I am not going to begin by asking a question. What I am going to do is invite you to discover something that I have grown more and more aware of as I live longer and deeper into the mystery of holiness in the presence of God. The fact is you don't have to be dead to be a saint. What you can do to grow in holiness and become more saintly is live these Beatitudes that Matthew leaves us in his fifth chapter. There in just twelve verses is the whole plan of sanctity, and nowhere in the list is "Blessed are the Dead."

Poor in Spirit are the holy. These are the ones who are not possessed by their possessions. Their hearts and their lives are free to give, to serve, to care for others. They put their trust in God knowing that things mean nothing and God means everything.

Loving and committed are the holy. Only these can mourn. People who have never loved, never bound themselves in a loving relationship know nothing of mourning. They just drift from one shallow relationship to another. While it is right to be detached from things, it is not right to be detached from people.

Meek are the Holy Ones. These are people who bless our lives with kindness, compassion, and patience. They are filled with respect for themselves and others.

Righteous are the Holy. They are good and they are good to be around. They judge no one but themselves. They find goodness in everyone.

Merciful are the Holy. They understand others and know what pain and suffering is like because they live for others not just for themselves. Merciful is what God is.

The Holy are Clean of Heart. They mean what they say, and they say what they mean. What you see is what you get. They are honest and pure. No agenda, no hidden motives with these people.

The Saints, make peace. They are never trouble makers. They are peace makers. The world is better because they are here. They live without bitterness.

It's all there, simply, clearly, and directly.

It is the way to holiness, and when we live it, there will be joy and gladness; and all Saints Day will be our day, and you won't have to be dead.

Audio Available

521

All Souls Day

11/2/2010

Isaiah 25: 6, 7-9 + 2 Corinthians 5: 1, 6-10 + John 6: 37-40

Fr. Boyer

Twice today, I walked out of my office and stood in the hall unable to remember what it was I needed. It happens to me all the time, and I hope I am not the only one who has this experience. We forget things, and sometimes it is not by choice.

There are other times when we can choose forget things or choose to remember. This is day and this evening is about choosing to remember. It is an opportunity, not an obligation: an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of the human spirit because as a church we are about remembering.

Yet the age in which we live is all about forgetting and about anonymity. This is an age when human persons who reflect the life and light of God are dehumanized and depersonalized by the deliberate forgetfulness of governments, institutions, and individuals. This is what allows us to wage war, to push buttons from afar that destroy human life because we can't see them, and then we can forget because we failed to remember that they were there to begin with. Forgetfulness does nothing for life, and has no place among the faithful. The very notion of faithfulness contradicts the notion of forgetfulness.

Our God is one who remembers, who remembers promises made, who remembers those who have known the fear and loneliness of oppression, powerlessness, and the treatment of those who would rob them of the dignity, identity, and their very soul. Once without soul, it is easy to make people expendable: to think of them as collateral damage. It is an all too common experience in human history but it is not one Christians live with.

Remembering is one of the great commands that Jesus speaks to us.

It is when we forget that we fall into sin.

It is when we forget that we break the bond of communion.

It is when we forget that we lose our way.

It is when we forget that we repeat mistakes

It is when we forget that war comes again on the face of the earth.

It is when we forget that we stumble.

It is when we forget that we fail to see the life of God in those beside us.

These last three days: Halloween, All Saints, and All Souls form a triduum of feasts about the dead. As Christians, we choose to remember like our God. We choose to revere and honor our dead, for they are not far from us. When we remember the death of the Lord until he comes again in glory, we are one with them all who await his return in glory.

We stand in a tradition that proclaims life, not death; honor and respect, not disposable life. In our tradition every life, born, unborn, dead, or alive has value and eternal significance. No one is expendable. Today we treasure our memory, our photos, mementos, medals, rings, and watches, the smiles and hugs and tears and all the love we have known from those who have died. We are with them in faith; we are in communion with them at this table for we believe in the communion of saints. All heaven and all earth bears witness to it. What we do today, we do in His memory and in memory of them all.

So today, All Souls Day, is about our memory and our will to remember what has been done for us, what has been given to us, and what has been asked of us We share life with all who have gone before us, and remember them because they still live with us, in us, and all around us.

Audio Available

522

Advent 1

11/27/2010

Isaiah 2.1.5 + Psalm 122 + Romans 13.11-14 + Matthew 24.37-44

Fr. Boyer

Long ago I lost count of the times when I have said these words. Those of you who belong to this parish and practice your faith consistently have heard these words often enough to know them as well. The words come from the Rite of Baptism and they go like this:

As Christ was anointed priest, prophet, and king, so may you always live as a member of His body sharing in everlasting life.

“So may you always live” it says, and every time I speak those words for the Church, I wonder when it will begin to happen.

This season beginning today is rooted in prophecy, and it is Isaiah who speaks to us week after week through this season. The Book of Isaiah spans a great length of history. It is the work of many hands, and themes rise up from its pages that reflect times more disturbing and unsettled than our own. From the terrorists of Assyria who wrecked havoc on Jerusalem no less than terrorists have wrecked havoc on us, to a painful and lonely exile in Babylon followed by a broken and fragmented return to Zion, Isaiah stirs visions of hope for a people barely faithful enough to listen; barely able to look ahead because they have looked back for so long; barely able to look outward because they have looked inward and looked only to themselves.

Isaiah writes to a people submerged in a culture of fear, and we are that people. A politic of fear has frightened and divided us. A new rhetoric of fear scares us into ideologies that offer us nothing but more of the same. We are living through a pandemic of depression just like Israel lived depressed and hopeless, for hope is the first thing lost by the depressed. People in sorrow and depression suffer from a sense of hopelessness and an impoverished imagination. They simply cannot imagine a world different from the one in which they are locked.

Into this hopelessness comes the church bearing the message and living the life of Christ who was above all and always is the prophet: the one who stirs dreams and excites the human imagination with thoughts, and ideas, and hopes of the Kingdom of God. We Christians are a prophetic people who can dream of new, and perhaps unheard of paths toward peace and reconciliation. Prophetic people do not sit back and sink into depression and helplessness. They do not whine and blame others for the plight of this world. Prophetic people live through these days and on this earth in one great life/season of Advent. They live with the constant hope and expectation that things will be better, that people will live in peace, that there will be forgiveness and reconciliation, that lions can lie down with lambs, that swords can make plows with which we can feed the hungry who do not have to live in poverty all the days of their lives.

This is Advent. It is the season of hope and of imagination. It is the season that leads us to look upon a baby and imagine the King of Glory. It is the season that invites us to look at shepherds and kings, and see more than rags and riches. It is a season that suggests that we might look up, look at stars, look for angels, and find the meaning of it all in a promise made to Abraham and Sarah.

We will not find hope in video screens, games, and the anonymity of chat rooms. These will not so much stir our hope and bring to life our imagination as they will dull and desensitize us into a deeper and more

deadly stupor that leaves us lonely and empty and sad. Our hope comes from remembering the promises made to us by God and repeated to us by the prophets. But the prophets for our day are not celebrity singers, models, and athletes. The prophets for our day are sitting in this church. They are people of faith, born in Baptism, anointed with the Holy Spirit who can see the unmistakable signs of the presence and action of God. They are willing to think and act as though there is something more for us than to simply become bigger consumers who dream in this season about having the latest gadget, toy, or pleasure. Our dreams must not be about what is in those packages already sitting under trees in living rooms. Our dreams must be about what God has begun to do in this world and what God has been asking of us for a long time.

Prophetic people, wake up! On the day of your baptism, some priest or deacon announced how you were to live. This is the season to recapture our imagination both collectively as a church and individually as God's chosen ones. As a church we can imagine peace, respect, dignity, forgiveness, acceptance, and love. Once we begin to imagine it, we can find a way to make it happen. As people we can imagine being pure, holy, faithful. We can imagine reconciling and forgiving. We can imagine using our time, our lives, gifts, our resources, without asking what we might get out of it, but excited and thrilled to think what God might get out of it.

In the midst of struggle and doubt, Isaiah did just that, and he brought joy when there was no earthly reason to have it. He brought hope when there was no way to imagine anything except more of the same misery and helplessness. He brought light into the darkest of times, not with some Pollyanna silliness, but with the truth of God's Word and God's promises fulfilled. It is Advent again, my friends. It is time to image what we can do with what God has given us and taught us in Christ His son. It is time to make real what began in our Baptism. It is time for prophets to rise, to live, to lift this world from its sorry self-serving depression. If we can take common bread and wine and feed our very souls, we can take our own flesh and blood and feed this world hungry for gentleness and peace. There is a better story to tell than the stories we hear night after night on the evening news. There is the story of woman who said yes when she had every reason to say no. There is the story of man who had every reason and right to walk away from the woman who was to be his bride yet did not. They had enough imagination to allow the possibility that God could make something of their mess and confusion and God did. Imagine that.

Audio Available

523

Advent 2

12/4/2010

Isaiah 11.1-10 + Psalm 72 + Romans 15.4-9 + Matthew 3.1-12

Fr. Boyer

It is easy with this Gospel passage to pay more attention to the messenger than to the message, but Matthew does not want that. He tells us nothing about John except what he wears, what he eats, and where he is. Stark details that for John's immediate audience made them think more about Elijah than the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth. It is his message that matters, not who he is.

And then it is easy to sit here and think John is talking back in those old days to crowds of people who came out to the desert to see and hear him. With that kind of thinking, we disconnect from the message, and we become spectators in a sort of Biblical drama that has a wild man ranting and raving at a crowd of locals who with nothing better to do walk out to the desert to what all the fuss is about. Let's be real about this. In those days, there was no cable TV, no Wii, no golf course, no entertainment what so ever. Of course they went out there, what else did they have to do? But this isn't about them nor about him. There is a message here and it is about us.

The message is still relevant and proclaimed every time we open the third chapter of Matthew's Gospel. The message is timeless and appropriate for anyone who might be living with some anticipation that Christ will come again. To begin their renewal, to begin Israel's rebirth conversion, John takes them away from the power of the city with its Temple and Palace. He takes them to the desert, that desert where it all began for them.

There he spoke about lives of integrity of relationships rooted in honesty and respect. He spoke up against presumption arrogant reliance upon one's presumed sense of privilege, against complacency, the shirking of responsibility and disinterest in the welfare of others. What's old about that message?

John's voice and his message still cry out to all of us who are tempted to compromise our principals in favor of looking good or being popular, where we are taught to get what we want with the least amount of effort, where we are encouraged to disregard the needs of others while we take care of number One, and where getting caught is a bigger shame than what we are caught doing.

The message of John proposes that authentic seekers of what is to come will bear good fruit, fruit that comes from repentance. The prophet Isaiah put before us examples of that good fruit today: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. But what is the fruit of our age? It isn't hard to recognize: anger and pride, resentment and jealousy, ambition and greed; and an arrogant disregard for human life. Look at this half empty church, and don't tell me it's half full. Some of you were not here last week and some will find an excuse for not being here next week. Bearing witness to faith and giving public praise and thanks to God has become in this age a matter of convenience. We resent obligation and duty and pretend that some kind of private spirituality is as good, fruitful, and worthy of us as religious faith practiced proudly and openly.

The call to repentance has serious and immediate consequences. A little cleansing with water (John's Baptism) is not enough. It's time for more than that. It's time for real purification by Fire. No shallow and superficial change of face will do. There must be a change of heart, and that will mean a change of life in which one's values and vision, hopes and dreams are completely altered. No more dreams of a rich and

comfortable life free of demands and worry. Now there will be a dream of sacrifice and service in which the only question is not what am I going to get out of this, but what more can I do for God and my neighbor. Gone will be a sense of privilege that suggests that we deserve anything replaced by the truth of obligation and duty with the conviction that everything we have is ours to give away like God and everything we have brings a responsibility for others.

This is something new. This begins to suggest that the Gospel is not merely an ideal to which we should like to aspire, but a practical, even though difficult, way of life that witnesses to the Prince of Peace - the one who is to come.

This day, this week of Advent, this season and it's great prophet propose that we take a serious look at ourselves and the fruit of our lives here. Only when we shall we have begun to hear and heed the message of the prophet who has spoken to us this day and in this place.

Audio Available

524

Immaculate Conception

12/8/2010

Genesis 3.9-15,20 + Psalm 98 + Ephesians 1.3-6,11-12 + Luke 1.26-38

Fr. Boyer

Just briefly today I want to draw your attention to a parallel found in the Gospel of Luke. Two different people experience a message from the Angel Gabriel. They both have very different responses to the message of the angel, and it is their responses I invite you to examine and ponder.

The Angel's news to both of them was basically good news, but there is no doubt that the news was a surprise, an interruption of their plans, and demanded a complete change of life and direction. Neither understand, but without understanding, one doubts while the other accepts and moves on.

The first to receive a message from Gabriel was Zachariah. He was old, very old. His wife had born no children. He was a member of the priestly tribe, and so his life was full of ritual, consistent, regular, scheduled, and dependable. Add to that, as I said his age, and you have a fairly rigid, old man who had every reason to be set his ways. The will of God is revealed to him by the Angel, and his response to the message was doubt; and why not? Who at his age would have wanted a child? Who at his age would have wanted to start life over again as a father with all the responsibilities. I mean who was going to teach the boy to drive? Zachariah was old enough to have his license suspended! And with a wife as old as Elizabeth? How as that going to work? The whole idea is not only preposterous, it's impossible, and so in the face of the impossible and the unexpected, Zachariah doubts, and as a result, he is silenced by God: "Struck Dumb" as most translations put it.

The next one to receive a message from Gabriel was a Virgin betrothed to man named Joseph in the town of Nazareth. The will of God again revealed by this busy angel is no less surprising, unexpected, impossible to imagine, and it posed just as many problems for her as the Will of God posed for Zachariah. When it comes to how they respond, their stories differ. Unlike Zachariah who doubts, she simply accepts the sudden and unexpected change that is announced to her, and she decides to make something of what some might think of as an unwelcome turn of events. And so, rather being struck dumb or silent, she heads for the hill country to tell it all.

Basically what Luke gives us is examples of behavior options that come when God's plans do not match our own plans. One option is the Zachariah option: doubt. The other option is a creative acceptance that suggests that working with or doing God's Will is an opportunity to share in God's plan for creation and redemption.

I can't count how many people I have seen in my life time who have faced sudden surprises, changes, tragedies, the unexpected and unplanned and ended up doubting God, angry with God, and in the end losing their faith and all their hope. At the same time, there are some people I can think of who have faced the unplanned, unexpected, and sometimes unwelcome surprises like the loss of a job, a medical crises, or a death; and rather than doubt God, give up on God, or get angry, they simply take what they can best perceive as part of God's plan and make something of it that is life giving, hopeful, and even joyful. Two options with the wonder of which we shall choose, that is what we get.

We might think of that today as we honor this woman who holds the promise of what we can all become by her example of trust in God and willingness to work with God's plan even when it is different

from our own.
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Advent 3

12/12/2010

Isaiah 35.1-10 + Psalm 146 + James 5.7-10 + Matthew 11.2-11

Fr. Boyer

Whenever I hear this Gospel passage, I can never help but think that John is sitting in Herod's prison a little disappointed. He has preached and preached about the coming Messiah insisting that he would put the ax to those who opposed him, separate the wheat from the chaff, and once and for all settle all the questions of justice. He is the one who pointed out the Messiah one glorious day in the midst of a throng coming to him for baptism. Now after all he has done to make ready the way of the Lord, look where he ends up. And so, he sends some of his friends to Jesus. Personally, I think he sent them simply to remind Jesus that he was sitting over there in that prison. I don't think the questions were the least bit important. I think he was really saying: "Excuse me! While you are running around curing the sick, the lame, the blind, and the deaf. I'm over here in jail. While you're dining with tax collectors and others of questionable repute, I'm over here eating this jail food. John's confidence is beginning to sag, and so the question: "Are you the one?"

If the questions are not really the point of the visit, neither are the answers, because all Jesus does is tell them what they already know if they've been paying attention. What Jesus says at the end is what matters; his ultimate and extraordinary compliment and affirmation of John's role and place in the Father's plan. With that affirmation, the disciples of John are comforted and affirmed about the importance and the character of their mentor and prophet. He compares John to the great Elijah and in doing so affirms his own identity as Messiah since the return of Elijah was to signal the arrival of the Messiah.

We never know if those disciples even went back to John, because immediately Matthew has Jesus begin to complain and speak harshly about those who will not see what is right before them, who will not recognize that God is working, and that the reign of God is at hand. And why do they not? Because, they had other ideas: other expectations; or perhaps other plans for God to do things their way and on their time.

Matthew puts before us the image of one who had expectations about how things were to be when the Messiah came, and because they were his expectations and not God's disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment set it. And there is nothing new about that. We do it all the time, and we know plenty of people who have had expectations about how God is supposed to fix things, settle things in their favor, and punish evil: about how God is supposed to answer prayers, especially certain kinds of prayers and from certain kinds of people. And when it doesn't happen that way, a great chill settles upon their hearts and souls.

A culture of privilege sets us up to think that we deserve something from God; a God's whose whole purpose in being is to give us more and more of what we want. So when we have to learn how to live with evil because God does not wipe it out, we don't always do too well. When we know that injustice and sin seem to be getting stronger, we think God is supposed to sweep in and wipe out the bad guys while we sit and cheer safely from the sidelines. When we go to Mass without fail every week, and sacrifice with our tithe, we get knocked off balance when a test comes back and confirms that we have a disease, or we get out of work, or one of our children suddenly exposes the fact that they are far from the perfect child we wanted. One of two things can happen: we affirm that we know how to handle

anything by watching the Messiah, or we get angry at God and quit the church wondering how could God let this happen after all we have done for God? That person dissolves into self-pity and alienation while the other goes on living with Joy.

On Advent's third Sunday, the Gospel gives us no answers any more than Jesus answered the question of John. It does give us a question. We all have dreams and ideas, visions and expectations about how things are supposed to be here in this Kingdom of God. If there is any hint in those expectations that God is going to sweep in and settle our conflicts, reward us with something we want, or pat us on the head and say how nice we are; we've have failed to ask the question this Gospel proposes. "Are you the one?" That is the question, and the question is asked of us.

Are you the one who is going to bring peace? Are you the one who is going to seek justice for the poor? Are you the one who is going to make the first move to heal a broken relationship? Are you the one who is going to speak up when someone is lying, cheating, or hurting someone else? Are you the one who is going to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality today? Are you the one? Or do we wait for another? That's the question this Gospel proposes. If we wait for someone else, it's going to be a long wait.

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Advent 4
12/19/2010

Dcn. Jacobson

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Christmas

12/25/2010

Isaiah 9: 1-6 + Psalm 96 + Titus 2: 11-14 + Luke 2: 1-20

Fr. Boyer

Everyone in this story from Luke's Gospel is going somewhere. It begins in an earlier chapter: Gabriel has come to Nazareth, Mary has goes to the "Hill Country" to visit Elizabeth. Then Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem. Shepherds make a journey to find a child. Then they return glorifying and praising God. Matthew has visitors coming from the East, and eventually, the Holy Family are headed to Egypt. Everyone involved, experiencing the Incarnation is on the move.

The older I get, the more times I celebrate this day, I become more and more convinced that the Incarnation is either an idea with a theological explanation or an experience rooted deeply in this life. Now of course, it can be both, but without moving from idea to experience, the divine purpose of this night remains simply an idea, a dream, a hope. For those people who become characters in Luke and Matthew's story, that movement from idea, from dream, from hope to reality is taking place. Their dream and their hope for a Messiah is moving from a hope and a promise to an experience and a fulfilled promise. "It's really happening!" is their experience in Bethlehem. Everything God promised, everything we hoped for, everything our prophets foretold is unfolding right now! And so, they begin glorifying and praising God.

Mary started the whole thing by running off to Elizabeth with her great hymn: "My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord."

Elizabeth joined in with her response of praise with a leaping baby in her womb!

Now these things are not happening exactly the way they had imagined. It is not the way they expected the Messiah and the restored/renewed Kingdom.

In the past angel messengers came to Moses, Abraham, Elijah, not to young women in Nazareth. In the past all the great things happened in Jerusalem not in "back-water" villages that no one who was anyone would claim or acknowledge as their own. Yet because these people: all these marvelous characters in the Gospels were willing to get into the action, into the journey, the Incarnation was real and immediate.

In other words, spectators and speculators were left out: left to think about it rather than celebrate it. Some were angry about it like Herod because God's plan threatened his way of life: his position, his privilege, his power.

Some were stubborn about it like Scribes and Pharisees resisting anything that did not match their expectations about how God should work and how the Messiah would be revealed, and what the Kingdom of God would look like and who would be included.

The fact of the matter (according to the Gospel writers) is that God's ways would be gentle and peaceful, so Herod's swords and violence were useless and only ended up excluding him. The fact of the matter (according to the Gospel writers) is that the new Kingdom of God would include the tax collectors, sinners, street people, thieves, and Gentiles: anyone who would repent and make the Journey to the New Jerusalem Jesus leads. It was journey to service and sacrifice, not to privilege and comfort.

We must tell this story of Christ's birth not because it is sweet and romantic made so by centuries of

artists and musicians, but because it is a story that includes us as well.

We can tell this story because we live it

because we have searched and searched for light, wisdom, and peace and we find Christ.

We can tell this story because we have felt like outsiders, doing the jobs no one else wants to do, like shepherds, and we have suddenly become aware that messengers have come to us that did not come to Kings and Rulers like Herod or Pilate.

We can tell this story because we have no home, no place to rest, and flee violence.

We can tell this story because we have gifts and are willing to go to any length to give them away to a poor child born in a manger.

We can tell this story because we can look at things that do not turn out the way we thought they would, and imagine that God can work wonders in surprising ways.

Yet those who chose to live as spectators in life will have no experience of the Incarnation. They will just tell this story year after year as though it were fairy tale.

Those who limit their knowledge of God's Word to hearsay or make it a study guide

without ever letting God's Word guide their lives will always remain sitting on the outside looking in.

This day is about a journey that involves searching and discovery, looking and asking, seeking, and imagining. It is about a kind of openness that allows shepherds to look at a baby and see a King; about a dying thief who says: "Remember me in your Kingdom." It is about seeing swaddling clothes that will soon become a shroud. There is no way to understand and experience the Incarnation without embracing the fact that we have to get up and move, get up and risk, get up and ask, go looking. We have to be as wise as old Herod and even consult the wisdom of the scriptures. We cannot be threatened or angry, disappointed or feel betrayed because God's surprise and God's plan might not match our own.

There is plenty of evidence in history that our plans for a Kingdom of Peace do not produce that Kingdom of Peace. We repress, we are violent, we are exclusive and protective. It isn't working because it is not God's way. Look again at the scene Luke proposes. Find yourself in the story because you have begun to live it, and you'll go home glorifying and praising God like never before because this is real, and it is happening right now in our lives.

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