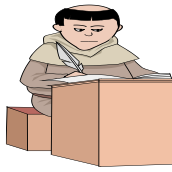


FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time - June 25, 2006 B

FAITH STRONG ENOUGH TO HELP US SURVIVE AND GROW THROUGH THE STORMS OF LIFE

In today's first and third readings, Job and Jesus' disciples are caught in a big storm and wonder if they will drown. They wonder where God and Jesus are.

Job found himself in a huge storm when God decided to act on Satan's suggestion to test Job's faith. In the opening chapter of the book of Job, God said to Satan: 'When traveling the earth did you see my wonderful servant Job?' Satan said: 'Job is only your faithful servant because you have greatly blessed him. Take away some of the blessings in his life and see what happens'

So God decided to do what Satan suggested. He took away Job's family, property and health. Job became very miserable and mad and challenged God to explain himself. For the longest time, God remained silent. Finally, he spoke. Today's first reading is an excerpt from God's speech to Job. It is not by any means a warm, fuzzy response. God basically says to Job: "Who are you to question my ways? Where were you when I created the world? Job, my lad, you cannot even begin to understand my ways." Eventually, Job gets the message and says: "Okay Lord, I will zip my lips. I should not have opened my mouth." Job totally submitted to God and his ways. He totally trusted that God knew what he was doing. Job tested out well. God rewarded him twice over for placing his faith in him. (Most scholars do not accept the book of Job as an historical book, but rather a wonderful story or parable of the great mystery of why bad things happen to good people.)

In the Gospel, the disciples are in a boat with Jesus. A storm rises up. Jesus is sound asleep, symbolizing his total trust in God. The disciples panic. Who wouldn't? They run to Jesus. He gets on their case for their total lack of faith. *Before* the storm, they may have believed they had faith and *now* they realize their faith is very weak, if not non-existent.

When Jesus calms the storm they ask: "Who is this that the wind and sea obey?" The answer is of course, that this God is at work in Jesus. The Jews believed that only God had authority over the wind and sea. Jesus is saying to his fear-filled disciples: "Don't worry, in the

storms of life, I am with you and I will not let you drown."

It is easy enough to believe these words of Jesus when we pray and we get the answers *we* are seeking; the doctor tells us the tests are benign. The marriage survives or we don't lose our job and pension. We say "God is so good. He really answered my prayers."

But what if the tests show we have cancer, the marriage ends in divorce and we do lose our job. What then? Can we still say, God is good? Many can't. Many experience a crisis of faith. They may say "God let me down. I feel abandoned by God. I have been a good Catholic all my life and now this. What is up? How could God allow this to happen to *me*?"

During such times, we are caught in the eye of a storm. How we cope with it will depend a great deal on what we have done to develop our faith over the years and how we have responded to the smaller storms that occurred at an earlier stage of our lives. If we have worked hard to build strong inner levees, the Katrina's of this life will, most likely, not drown us. But, if our faith is weak and shallow, there is a good chance we will be blown away spiritually by life's storms. We may even continue to say prayers and come to Mass, but our relationship with God may be distant and sour. We may have a very hard time getting over the fact that God lets us down and did not seem to come to our rescue in a time of great need.

The problem of course is that *we* have lost control and God is *not* running the world as *we* think he should. This may make us very angry. We are fortunate if we can recognize our anger, name it, own it and deal with it. All too often people are mad at God and will not admit and face it. Needless to say, all of us do or should have immense compassion for people who may have lost everything or a huge chunk of their lives. Few of us can be sure of how we might deal with such a loss and the spiritual crisis that may come with such a tragedy.

In Chinese language the word *crisis* means two things, *danger* and *opportunity*. When we experience a spiritual crisis the *danger* is that we lose our faith in God or our relationship with him becomes distant and cold. The *opportunity* is the crisis may lead us to new *growth* and *development*.

Hanging in there during the tough times and keeping faith in God is usually not easy. We may feel stretched beyond our limits. Sometimes we may honestly not agree that God's grace is sufficient. We may experience a real dark night of the soul. Calvary was certainly a dark night for Jesus. I assume it was also for Mary. But they continued to trust when all seemed hopeless.

In the journey of life, Jesus not only rides in the boat with us. He actually lives in us. And if we cooperate with him we will come to a place of absolute trust and surrender. Like Job, we may lose everything and all our security. But in the process we will gain all.

Developing a Strong Faith That Gets Us Through the Tough Times

I am not aware of any easy formula for steps for developing a faith that helps us to survive or better still grow through the tough times. But I do know that many of you do have this faith because I frequently see it in actions. I see people who do get bad news about health issues, layoffs, suffer losses and remain amazingly strong in their faith. Of course, I do also sadly see people who pull away from God and church when bad news comes their way and prayers remain unanswered.

Now, let's name some things we can do to grow or develop a faith that will help us make it through the stormy events of life. The following are not in any particular order.

- Often pray for the gift of strong faith. "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." "Lord, help me to keep believing in your love and care even when you seem silent and distant."
- When tough times hit and God seems distant, we need to develop the ability to be *honest* with God about how we feel about his *seeming* absence. (God is *always* only *seemingly* absent.) Many human relationships go cold because of people's inability or unwillingness to face difficulties and deal with them. So it is with our relationship with God.
- We need to *exercise* and live the faith we presently have. If we don't it will wither away and die. We *exercise* our faith when we try to replace fear with trust, hostility with hospitality, resentment with forgiveness, stinginess with generosity. We live and exercise our faith by using it to help us deal with the problems of daily life. For example, our

prayer was not answered in the way *we* wanted it answered. We can get mad with God and distant ourselves from him. Or we can tell God how disappointed we are but trust that he knows what he is doing. We *exercise our faith* when we learn to be gentle with our own shortcomings and the shortcomings of others. *We exercise our faith* when we work hard at *not* allowing resentments to take root in our hearts.

- Having faith friends can be an enormous help in the tough times. Those of you who are a part of a Small Christian Community see this again and again. In tough times, the faith and support of friends can be a wonderful help.
- Discussing our difficulties with a good spiritual guide can also be a major help and encouragement. It may help us to gain new insight in the workings of God and faith. All too many adults carry into adulthood a *childish* faith (not to be confused with a *childlike* faith), which is insufficient to deal with the major issues of life. For example, a *childish faith* thinks and believes that if we are good and go to church, God will not allow harm to cross our path. An *adult* faith believes harm may come our way but if we cooperate with God's grace we will not only survive the tough times but actually grow through them. A spiritual crisis is often God's way of getting our attention and moving into a more mature relationship with him.
- Being open to being prayed with is also another help. Unfortunately, all too many people try to weather the storms of life alone. Reflecting on today's Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes: *Life can be compared to a voyage. Though each one of us has to pilot our own little craft, the life of a Christian is not meant to be a solo voyage. We journey with our fellow Christians, and thus are able to support one another in tough times.*

Crisis experiences can make us or break us. They can make us bitter or better. It all depends on *our response*. We should often pray for people who are going through a tough time that they will have the faith and support of friends to help them weather the storms of life. I close this piece of my column with two quotes and a one-liner prayer:

"Nothing is to be feared. It is only to be understood." (Marie Curie)

"Faith declares what the senses do not see, but not

the contrary of what they see. It is above them, not contrary to them” (Pascal)

When fearful and anxious pray: *“Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in you.”*

That is what Jesus was asking the disciples to do in the boat, to place their trust in him.

Reflection Questions

- What is the state of your faith life at this time? Is it static or growing.?
- What has helped you or helps you grow in faith?
- How easy or hard is it for you to be honest and up front with God when things are not going well and when you think he is not helping you with your problems?
- How easy or hard is it for you to reach out and seek the support of others when a storm enters your life?

Eucharistic Adoration

I thank all of you who help us to have round-the clock prayers at Ascension. Only God knows the full impact of such unceasing prayer. I especially thank those of you who have volunteered to take the late evening hours and early morning hours. I thank our twenty-four captains for each of the twenty-four hours of the day. See their names below. I thank Ed Beasley for doing a wonderful job of keeping up our weekly sign in roster. I thank Gerry Peek and Bill Quisenberry for overseeing this prayer ministry. I encourage those of you who have signed up for a particular hour but often do not show up to try hard to be more faithful. Prayer is the backbone of the spiritual life. It is the backbone of parish life. Our Apostolic action must always be backed up with prayer and our prayer of course must lead to Christian action.

What is Eucharistic Adoration?

Eucharistic adoration is the act of worshiping God as he is present in the consecrated Eucharist. Since the last Supper, when Jesus broke the bread and distributed the wine, saying, “This is my Body” and “This is my Blood,” Catholics have believed that the bread and wine are no longer merely baked wheat and fermented grape juice, but the actual living presence

of the Second Person of the Trinity. Spending time before the Blessed Sacrament, in prayer and devotion, is exactly the same as spending time before the living God.

“We have come to do him homage.”

Those words, spoken by the Magi from the East as they searched for the infant Jesus, resound through the centuries to be echoed in the heart of every person who makes a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. The presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is as real today as the infant Jesus was to the Wise Men who sought Him by following a star rising in the East. As Pope John Paul II affirms in his encyclical on the relationship of the Eucharist to the Church, “...the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of his boundless love.” (*The Church and the Eucharist*, 1)

Propagation of the Faith Visit

Each year the Diocese assigns a missionary priest to visit each parish and speak about his ministry and seek our help, seek prayers and take up a special collection. Next weekend, Fr. Raja, a Franciscan priest from Mumba Province, India will be here. Fr. Charles, our summer help from Malta will also be next weekend for the month of July. There will be a special second collection.

I will be in Chicago July 1-8 at Loyola University a 2006 Institute for Adult Spiritual Renewal. I will be busy getting my halo all shined up. I will get to see my brother who teaches at Loyola Medical School.

A Letter from New Orleans

I recently got a letter from a parish in New Orleans whom we helped with \$10,000 for Katrina collection and \$10,000 from Parish Tithe. I first met Fr. Doussan when I took a course on parish life way back in the 70’s. Recently, I met him at a conference. He told me about his parish, which is mostly African American. The Archbishop wanted to close his parish but he and the people want to keep it open. Katrina did about \$70 million dollars worth of damage to church properties in the New Orleans diocese. They received \$14 million from insurance. St. Gabriel’s will get none of that money since the Diocese had selected it as one of the parishes to close. Since Fr. Doug has a great passion for helping the poor, I was glad we were in a position to help him and his parish. The following is the text of the letter I received from Fr. Doug.

Dear Fr. Tobin and Members of the Ascension Catholic Community,

I would like to thank you for the generous gift of \$20,000.00 to assist St. Gabriel parish in our efforts to rebuild our parish plant and the homes and lives of our people.

Our parish plant was covered with 6-8 feet of water which destroyed almost everything in our church and on the first floor of our parish building and the homes of our parishioners. We are slowly recovering because of your generosity and the generosity of others like you. We now have Mass every Sunday in our church building, which is clean but unrenovated. Approximately 200 of our parishioners attend Mass each week, most of them driving 30 minutes to one hour to get here since very few are able to live back in our community, and these in FEMA trailers.

Since we lost everything in our first floor parish offices, we are using your generous contribution to establish our offices on the second floor of our administration building. Last week we were able to obtain electricity and air-conditioning on the second floor of this building. Your gift has enabled us to purchase a copying machine (which cost us \$6,800), a fax machine, and a new phone system. We had to have the entire building de-molded by a professional company, which cost us over \$5,000. We will use the rest of your gift to purchase file cabinets, book shelves, storage cabinets, and an office safe, a small refrigerator and microware and other small office equipment and supplies. Your generosity has made all this possible and we are deeply grateful.

Our parish has made a commitment to every family that wants to return: we will help them accomplish this goal in every way we can from our own parish resources and the resources we receive from other parishes. Right now we are doing this by organizing volunteers from other Catholic parishes out of state to come to St. Gabriel and clean out and gut the homes of our parishioners. We are also purchasing insulation and sheetrock to provide them with these

materials when we have volunteers who can help install these. We hope that some of the funds you have sent us can be used for this purpose as well.

Please be assured of a constant remembrance of gratitude in our prayers for all that you have done for us. You have given us hope and courage to face an uncertain future.

In the peace of Christ,

Fr. Doug Doussan
Pastor, St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish
New Orleans, LA
ddous@aol.com

Have a prayerful week,

