

St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A – June 21, 2020

Homily by Msgr. Watkins, Pastor

My dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Ann's Church here in Washington, DC.

I greet all of you who join us by way of electronic media today, and I want to wish all of our fathers today a special wish for a blessed Fathers Day and to thank you for being courageous witnesses to your children, as St. Joseph was to his child, his son, Jesus.

Also, allow me to welcome Fr. Dennis McManus, priest of the Archdiocese of Mobile, and professor at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg and lecturer at Georgetown University, among other very important ministries, who concelebrates with me this holy Mass. And to note that next weekend, we will re-open with our Sunday schedule of Masses for a maximum capacity of 100 people at 5:00pm Saturday evening and Sundays at 7:30am, 11:00am (continuing our livestreaming of that Mass for the benefit of others), and 7:00pm. We are temporarily suspending the 9:00am Mass at this time. See our website for all the details of what you need to know as we seek to offer public Masses again here at St. Ann's Church. Weekday Masses resume tomorrow at 12:00 noon.

And allow me to thank on your behalf my sister, Susan Watkins, one of our parishioners, who makes all of the vestments and sanctuary venture for us at St. Ann's Church. What a beautiful improvement all of this has been for us who benefit from her God-given gifts which assist us to worship in beauty which is appropriate to Catholic liturgy. Thank you, Susan!

So, we worship this Sunday as the Church returns to the numbered Sundays in the liturgical calendar in what we call Ordinary Time. Just a brief word about "Ordinary." The word "Ordinary" doesn't mean the "usual" or "every day" or "ho-hum" or even something opposed to "EXTRAordinary." Rather, "Ordinary" refers to the counting numbers for those Sundays which are not associated with any particular Feast or special Solemnity. So, here we are in the Twelfth of some Thirty-Four Sundays in Ordinary Time, and the color shifts back to Green, the liturgical color for this Ordinary Time.

Yet, what seems liturgically Ordinary doesn't quite fit all the EXTRA ordinary nature of the events going on in our nation and world these months – quite the contrary. If anything, the pandemic of coronavirus and COVID 19, the storms of protests and demonstrations in the wake of the death of George Floyd, coupled with the removal of Confederate monuments and symbols associated with historic and enduring racism in our land, the uneasy economy and political landscape, and a whole host of issues and problems here and abroad – all of this together can seem so EXTRA ordinary events that they can overwhelm the mind and heart. The year of 2020 has been anything BUT ordinary! In fact, I have joked that my hope was that we'd all SEE more clearly in 2020 with 20/20 vision this year, but so many of the events going on all around us have blurred things a lot.

And when we can't SEE clearly, when things get blurry, even when a kind of blindness sets in, there's cause for alarm, fear, anxiety, even despair. Associated with all the events going on around us which the media bombards us constantly with bad news here and worse news there, the feeling of helplessness, anger, uncharitable thoughts and feelings, and, as we said, fear and anxiety can pop up and take over. In those moments, we have to take a huge pause, a deep breath, and even a long nap! My brother once told me that anytime I want to write a nasty email or letter to someone about something which has upset me, to take a little time, wait one day for each line of my angry letter, and then decide at the end if I really want to send it, if I really NEED to send it. Almost always, he is right. I don't NEED to send those angry letters. Wait before you act, don't make too many hasty decisions, never act out of anger or distress, but be patient for a time, relax, and, most especially PRAYER. I have found my brother's prudent counsel SO helpful in times when someone's hurt my feelings, misjudged me, or lied about me to others. Just take some time to sit back with all of those uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, and reflect on what Jesus would do in the situation.

In a way, isn't that in part what is going on in the Book of Jeremiah today. Here Jeremiah is profoundly aware that the critics of his day want to bring him down. "I hear the whisperings of many...Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail and take our vengeance on him.'" Many of the Old Testament prophets were misjudged and maltreated, even killed. Of

course, of all that is but the precursor to Jesus, the greatest of the prophets (and more) who would in time be misjudged, tortured and crucified by the critical voices of His own day. And that can be our own story and experience, too, or any variation on that theme. None of us likes to be misjudged, maltreated, hurt, or exposed unjustly. All of that violates us. It's abusive, and it's so opposed to charity and the love of God and neighbor. And with those unjust actions against us, it's so easy to want to get even, to take vengeance on people, to lash out. Each of us is different in some respects in how we handle our response to these unjust situations, but my point is that I wonder how many of us, following my brother's prudent advice about anger management, really stop to take the time to listen, to reflect, and especially to pray in those moments when it would SEEM easier and even SEEM just and even SEEM the right thing to settle the score with "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

If we look at Jeremiah's response to the unjust critics who want to bring him down and denounce his good name publicly, he says, "But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure, they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion." In other words, Jeremiah puts all of his feelings to the side and hands them over the Lord for HIS judgment, HIS justice. And Jeremiah finds some personal satisfaction in realizing that in handing over his difficulty to the Lord that in the end the LORD will vindicate the injustice, when he says, "...let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause." "...to YOU I have entrusted my cause." So, I believe that if I hand over my difficulty to the Lord with faith and trust that HE will take care of me, then I can find some peace, some refuge, some solace amidst the storm. And then, like Jeremiah, I can say, "...for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!" He has rescued me from their power over me.

Not what's "their power over me"? I think we make a big mistake when we think we can get even with people on our own. Ironically, we can, often unwittingly, make someone else's anger our own anger. We give them a certain power over us when we allow THEIR anger to become OURS. We buy into their power and it can take over. We say we want justice. I wonder if we really want justice, or do we want vengeance (masquerading as justice). I wonder. I think the recent protests and marches have been filled with a lot of people who are peacefully

demonstrating for authentic justice and an end to racism in our land and for a number of JUST causes as they perceive things. There's a kind of RIGHTEOUS anger going on there which is correct, rational, and wonderful. Then there's something else going on which blurs things, makes things irrational and wrong, in fact, unjust, and that's what we call VENGEANCE. Getting even with somebody or even demonstrating against a "system" with VENGEANCE comes from a deep-seated anger which shows itself in an irrational way, which we call SIN. That's the stuff of the "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" stuff which Jesus condemns, not because Jesus is not about justice, but that He's about God's working out the justice properly and that we rely on His justice and not our own version of that. See, when we don't keep God in the picture when it comes to fighting for causes of justice, then we set ourselves up to do it OUR way, and so often that's a selfish and uncharitable, truly UNJUST way. It's a delicate balance, I know, but it's very important spiritually. And the spiritual weapon is always relying first upon grace BEFORE we make any decisions. When we make decisions in compulsive reaction emotionally or rashly without thinking it through, on the other hand, that's not of God but of Man. We allow our fuse to be sooooo short, that we don't take time to pause and reflect and pray and by that time, it's all over. BOOMB! So, to address any injustice requires first a clear reliance on the grace of God which has been given to us through the perfect act of justice, namely, the sacrifice of Jesus. And that brings us to the Second Reading today.

St. Paul writes in so many words that SIN, the Original Sin of Man and Woman, came about when Adam and Eve thought they could control the justice of things. They wanted to act as if they were God themselves. And there's a huge consequence to that irrational choice. Paul writes, "Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death." But, he goes on to tell us that the injustice committed by Mankind could never be properly addressed, made up for adequately by Man. And so a NEW Man, born of a NEW Woman, would be required intelligently to afford a proper justice before God for the injustice, and that NEW Man is Jesus, born of the NEW Woman, Mary. St. Paul goes on, "For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many." Again, "...how much more did the GRACE of God ... overflow for the many." So, it's the GRACE of God which affords a more adequate response to the injustice which not only Adam and Eve but every man and every woman commits. Relying

on the GRACE of God is crucial. See, Jesus and Mary are, in a spiritual sense, our FIRST RESPONDERS! We see a lot of First Responders in our time, and we admire them for their heroic acts in the face of overwhelming challenges. Our doctors and nurses and healthcare workers, EMS, volunteers, firemen and women, and yes, many faithful and trustworthy police, all of whom respond to incredible and dangerous situations every hour to save lives. We rely on them. We need them. We can't do this without them. In a sense, we get out of the way, so they can do their jobs. When WE, on the other hand, try to control the situation ourselves, rush in and think WE can do the job better, WE can bring about a just resolution, WE can solve the problem, WE can do it, often enough (not always but often enough), confusion and even more complications happen. We need to get out of the way. And that's hard to do if you're a control freak who thinks YOU know what's best all the time and have all the answers.

By analogy, we rely on Jesus and Mary, and not ourselves, as our FIRST RESPONDERS, because they know what they are doing best. We couldn't save ourselves, so God sent us His only Son. Note that God didn't send a Committee! He didn't send a Task Force. He didn't send an army! He didn't send us money! He didn't send a Memo! (Not that any of that doesn't have its place when it has a PROPER place, mind you!) No, He sent His only Son! That's incredible. God could have done it, I suppose, with all of the other means and more, but He sent the First Responder born of another First Responder, and told us to get out of the way because our thinking under the Old Law could never justify us before God. So, get out of the way, stand aside, and let them do their job! And the job is quite simple. Let Jesus die for you. What? Let Jesus put to death the transgressions against you. Make the humble act to place all of your anger and even all of your desire to get even, all of your hurt feelings, all of your uncharitable thoughts, all of your sins before the Cross and let Him take them and crush them in the crucible of His divine justice. In other words, as we've said so many times from this pulpit, "Take yourself off the Cross, because someone else needs the wood!" In other words, if you can't love somebody, let Jesus do it for you. If you can't forgive that person, let Jesus forgive him or her for you. If you want to be vengeful, think before you act and hand it over to Jesus who will nail it to the Cross for you. You really don't have to do it. It's really not your call. It's HIS! And this is HIS gift. You and I didn't deserve it. Don't ignore the gift. Don't cast it aside. St. Paul writes, "But the gift is not like the transgression ..." and, "... how much MORE did

the GRACE of the one man Jesus Christ OVERFLOW for the many.” In other words, the gift of God is the Grace which He affords us and not what we think we can afford ourselves. If we get out of the way, Jesus can do the work. He can respond in our moments of crisis and hurts and wounds and bad feelings about everything going on around us.

See, I think our nation is at a critical moment in history, as every civilization experiences its critical moments, when the crucial ingredient of prayer has been forgotten or attempts made to rub it out of the recipe for national healing. When God is pushed to the side or eliminated from the equation, history has told us that very bad things begin to happen. I don't know exactly why. I don't even attempt to know the answer. I do believe, however, that it is a most intelligent mystery. And we have been speaking about Mystery these last weeks from this pulpit, and I think we have a very intelligent mystery going on here, not to scare us, but to wake us up and get it together. We say, “We can get through this together.” You mean, “GOD and We can get through this together.” Right? Or am I missing something.

If we deny HIS presence and power, HIS grace, HIS desire to save us, to heal us, to transform us into HIS image and likeness (and not our own), if we deny all of that which is HIS gift to us through his divine sacrifice which makes all of that really present to us through the sacrament of HIS body and HIS blood poured out for the many, then, as our Lord says, “But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.” Wow! He's not messing around here, friends. Jesus knows WE will be messing around if he think differently. We've been messing around for a long time now. So often, I'm afraid, as a Church and as a Nation, we don't pray, we don't call upon His divine Name, we don't invoke the saints, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, we don't confess, we don't take the spiritual realities of sin and Satan honestly and all their evil powers (and they are real, believe me!), we don't really trust in God. And this sets up a Titanic moment. All of this doesn't just happen in a day. It takes time. Not being an alarmist, I think there's an intelligent moment for us in these circumstances to take a serious look at things, a very sober look to SEE more clearly with 20/20 vision in this historic year of 2020, through the lens of Jesus and Mary that WE are not in control. Adam and Eve thought they were. That's always Satan's design, to make us THINK that WE are in control and that WE have all the answers, and that

WE collectively can solve the world's problems, and that WE are ... well, that WE are our own Gods. Human history is fraught with examples of Pride before the Fall (Hubris and Nemesis, as the Greeks call it). On the other hand, Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel today, "Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father." So, He instructing us to acknowledge Him, to claim Him as our fortress and our shield." As Jeremiah hearkened earlier, "The Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble; they will not triumph." But it won't be precisely because I or WE accomplished this on our own. This is where GRACE comes in. The life and love of God can win the victory for us. And that gift of GRACE comes really and powerfully in the divine presence of the God-Man who re-presents Himself again and again on this altar of sacrifice in his victory over Satan and all His empty promises through the sacrament of the His Body and His Blood, the Mystery we spoke of last week, in the Holy Eucharist. As St. Paul writes of our Lord, "...the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many." In a moment, those same words spoken over the elements of bread and wine, "For you and for the many so that sins may be forgiven."

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, pray for the grace to accept His control in your life, right now. Pray that we stop messing around with our feeble attempts to control everything which actually makes us even angrier since we can't ultimately control anything and think we can be Gods. Pray that the Holy Spirit inspire our leaders and those who protest and march. Pray that the Holy Spirit come upon our nation and our world. Pray and do not cease to pray. Do not persist in your unbelief but believe, Jesus says. "And know that I am with you always." So, fear no one. Let no one take possession of our soul but our divine Lord, the First of all Responders who wins even now the victory for us and heals us from sin and division and unites us in His Body and Blood so that we can acknowledge Him first and that HE, in turn, can acknowledge us before the Father in Heaven. Let Him take control of our lives. Let Him possess us. Let us not be possessed by other demons and voices which would divert the Will of the Son to accomplish the Will of the Father.

God love you and keep you safe in His Fatherly care.

