

St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A – July 12, 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 in the pews today as we continue to re-open gradually and accommodate parishioners who return to Mass, and to those who join us by way of electronic media today, I welcome you and invite you to participate in spiritual communion with us on this Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

We've been speaking about Mystery a good deal these last weeks. Our Catholic Faith is filled with ancient Mysteries: the Most Holy Trinity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mystery of the Motherhood of God, the Mystery of the Incarnation, the Mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, the Mystery of Salvation, the Mystery of Good and Evil, the Mystery of Divine Providence, the Mystery of the Priesthood, the Mystery of Faith. So many Mysteries, imbued with intelligence, meaning, and wisdom, and all revealed in so many ways by Jesus who is truly God and truly Man – which is quite a Mystery in itself!

And each of us has his or her personal stories of mysteries to share, experiences which continue to baffle us as we remember them. I remember one such mystery in my life. I was about 8 or 9 years old at the time, working with my father at his wood bench in the garage. He was an excellent carpenter and engineer (like my brother, Ed Watkins), good with his hands with wood. I was pounding a nail into a small board, looking important! As kids growing up in a Navy family, we used to hear a lot of talk about the Soviets. I don't know why, but only as kids can repeat the conversations they hear from parents, I remember asking my Dad, "How many nuclear submarines do the Soviets have?" Without missing a beat and remaining focused on his wood project, Dad replied, "Son, that's Classified Information." So, I went upstairs and opened The Washington Post and looked through the section called, "Classifieds" with the hope of my finding my answer. Needless to say, it wasn't there. But I KNEW there was an answer to my question.

I just knew there had to be an answer, even if I didn't know it myself. Many years later, long after the Berlin Wall came down and Soviet Communism came to an end, I remember revisiting my question to my father. "Dad, do you remember when I asked you about how many nuclear submarines the Soviets had? Now that all of that information has been De-Classified, could you tell me?" My father looked at me and said, "Son, I never really knew." And to this day, all of that remains a mystery to me. But I know there's an answer, and I know somebody knows. Somebody always knows.

A mystery doesn't mean there isn't an answer. Mystery doesn't mean that somebody doesn't know. And in the Mysteries of Faith which we believe as Catholics, there are intelligent answers to these Mysteries, and for 2000 years the Church has been probing these Mysteries to share their meaning and wisdom with us. And these Mysteries are, in a certain sense, Classified Information. These Mysteries are not known by the majority but by a relatively small band of people. Our divine Lord says as much, when we hear his words to those early disciples: "Because knowledge the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted." So, when you think about it, a lot of what we believe as Catholics is kind of Classified Information. I don't pretend to know everything about what I believe, but that doesn't mean that I don't want to know more and more about these Mysteries, and the more and more I probe them in mind and heart through prayer, I come to understand them better, or I have more questions with an eye towards understanding them. With time, they can begin to make more and more sense. These Mysteries of Faith begin to become interwoven into a magnificent mosaic, each piece of the mosaic fits together with another and another and another, until the whole masterpiece is one, glorious display of Truth, The Truth, who is God, revealed in Jesus fully. Wow! I can actually come to know some answers about what I believe.

So, why is so much of what we believe Classified, as it were? Why doesn't Jesus reveal all of these Mysteries to everyone in the world as He has done so by God the Holy Spirit through His Church these last 2000 years? Why don't all believe as we believe them? Well, as our Lord said, "Because knowledge of the mysteries ... has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted." That doesn't sound fair. Well, it didn't sound fair to me when no one would tell me how many nuclear submarines the Soviets had either! So, I had to figure it out for myself.

And that's what we are invited to do with these Mysteries of Faith – we are invited, challenged, to figure them out. Oh, they remain Mysteries in the end, for sure, but that doesn't preclude me from delving into them, asking questions (like I did to my father). Liken it to the Mystery of love between two persons. You can't actually figure out everything about the one you truly love, so it does remain a mystery, but that doesn't mean you don't care to know more and go deeper into that relationship to understand more about them and, I propose, your own self (another great mystery).

Jesus goes on to say in today's Gospel that people over the ages do not understand the Mysteries because they have closed their hearts, closed their eyes. "They look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand." And, "...lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted." So, we seek to understand what we believe. Our is a Faith seeking Understanding, as St. Anselm once said. *Fides quaerens intellectum*. Faith and Reason. *Fides et Ratio*. So, there's the Faith in the Mystery, and then there's the Understanding of the Mystery as Mystery. And that's when Faith takes off, because it gets exciting to know and experience the fruits of its wisdom. For example, if we take the Mass as a Mystery and say, "Well, the Mass is so complicated and so ritually intricate and there are so many moving parts and there's a lot of stuff going on and I can't figure it out and, well, I just don't know," that doesn't mean the Mass is in itself unintelligent. What it means is that I don't know the answer, I don't understand the Mystery of the Mass. Well, we could spend a whole series on understanding just what the Mystery of the Mass is, and I think we will do that one day by way of Podcasts here from St. Ann's. But not today, not today.

But it is enough for today that we who are believers understand that if there is a desire to know more about the Mysteries of our Faith, it's because there is something real in our souls which yearns to know. See, science tells us that every effect has a cause. So, if I desire to know, that's an effect. Therefore, I ask about the cause of that effect. The cause of my desire to know more and more the Mysteries of my Catholic Faith is Baptism. It was in Baptism that the seed of God's sanctifying grace was planted in me. I can't get rid of that seed. God planted it there. That seed is His Word, we say. The words were spoken over us as holy water was poured, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the

Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Once that was done, once that cause was enacted, the effect occurred; we were washed of Original Sin and adopted as Children of God. We were no longer Children of the World, of the Old Adam and the Old Eve, but effected as Children of the New Adam, Jesus, and of the New Eve, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Baptism opened the gates to a whole new way of life for us and afforded us more and more, and more and more grace. Confirmation sealed all of that, and the Eucharist sustains all of that, and prayer and reflection on Scripture, and all of our spiritual efforts stem from that first planting.

This is why our divine Lord in today’s Gospel speaks about the planting of the seed, the Word, within us. Everyone who is baptized has that Word planted deep within them. It might just remain a seed for some, because maybe they choose not to cultivate it, tend to it, nourish it, water it. For others who do tend to that seed, it grows. This is where God respects our own free-will and choice in the matter. But whatever the case, that seed cannot be taken from us, short of an all-out conscious choice to eliminate it entirely from our lives, which I dare say, happens to very few. I’ve known many a Catholic in my 31 years as a priest who will come to me and say, “Father, I’ve been away from the Church most of my life. I don’t go to Church, I don’t confess my sins, I don’t practice ... but I do believe.” Now, if not everyone in the world believes what we believe (“Because the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God have been granted ...” to the relatively few, some 23% Catholic in the world), how does that person come to me and say, “I don’t know why I believe, but I do believe,” get that? Remember that every effect has a cause. So, something must have occurred which gives that person the desire to believe. It’s not terribly complicated a Mystery. “I don’t know WHY I believe, but I do believe.” That seed was planted at Baptism. Now, we can help it grow with God’s grace so that it yields, as Jesus says, “a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold,” or we can settle for less. The choice is ours on a daily basis.

I would hope that during this pandemic when most of our are spending more time alone or spending it relatively quietly, when more time is afforded us to take the time to be quiet and listen, to take the time to reflect, to take the time to pray and reflect, that we will come to understand a bit more of the Mysteries of our Faith and desire them more, not less. Just a little more. It doesn’t have to be a lot, just a bit. The seed that yields the fruit takes time. This is valuable time, I think, to water and carefully tend to the garden of our souls and find therein the

beauty and goodness of ourselves and to remember who we are, by remembering whose we are, Children of God, effected through Baptism, sealed by the Blood of the Lamb in Confirmation, and sustained by the precious Body and Blood of the Savior who says, in the end, "to understand with their hearts and be converted and I heal them."

Isn't that in part why we come to Mass, why we worship, because we understand in Faith that Jesus will do this incredible work of salvation in us, for us, and through us? We come to be healed and in His divine mercy can grow. May that seed of Faith planted deep within you grow by His grace this day and may His grace give you just a little more resolve and strength to tend to the garden of our soul with acceptance of His amazing plan to gather you close to Him and hold you fast.

God love you.