

Second Sunday of Lent

March 7 (8), 2020

4:00 p.m. Vigil Mass

Sacred Heart of Mary, Silver Creek

We've made it thru the first full week of March, and so far, it looks like "Punxsutawney Phil" has been correct---this mild Winter is winding down, and Spring is less than two weeks away. Later tonight, we "spring forward" by moving our clocks one hour ahead, and will begin "Daylight Saving Time". We don't want to say it too loudly, but we may be "out of the woods", so to speak, and can soon put Winter 2019/20 behind us.

And with the more moderate temperatures returning, perhaps our outdoor exercise programs may be getting back on track---jogging, walking and maybe even getting a round of golf in. I'm sure we all know what a wonderful exercise walking is. Does anyone here have one of those "fit bits"? Or perhaps some of you may use an App on your phone to measure how many "steps" you walk each day? I'm told that it is recommended that we all walk 5,000 to 10,000 steps every day. One of my sisters seems very committed to getting her steps in. She walks outdoors every day, rain, snow or shine, and if she doesn't make it to her quota of 12,000 steps, she'll spend the last hours in the evening just walking in place. Should we be worried that there might be a bit of an "obsession"?

Jesus and His Apostles spent a lot of time walking. If Jesus had a "fit bit" or one of those Apps, I'm sure He would have set all-time records. And all that walking time for Jesus was put to good use: He prayed, and talked and discussed; He took the time to teach His disciples about the Kingdom of God, and to share with them Who God is, and what God is asking of us. In fact, in this section of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus and His Apostles are walking all the way to Jerusalem---more than 70 miles from Nazareth---that's a lot of "steps", for sure.

In the section of Matthew's Gospel just before today's passage, Jesus and His Apostles were involved in some pretty "intense" conversations----at least 3 of them we find in the chapter just before today's passage.

The First Conversation: Jesus asks His Apostles: *"Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?" They answered: Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets."* Jesus said: *"But who do YOU say that I am?".....Peter's amazing insight: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."* Jesus' commendation.....

The second conversation: Almost right after that, Jesus tells them that He, and they, are on their way to Jerusalem, and lets them know what would take place there: “*That He would be betrayed, arrested, and suffer greatly at the hands of the religious leaders, and be put to death--and to be raised from the dead on the third day.*” Peter, exhilarated by his very recent “promotion”----You are Peter and on this Rock I will build My Church.....-----decides to try to correct Jesus that that wasn’t possible----how could the Messiah die? Everyone knew what the Messiah was destined to be, and to do----to set the Jewish People free from their oppressors. But Jesus cut Peter down to size, and said: “*Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle---You are not thinking as God thinks, but as human beings do.*”

And as they walked along a little farther, Jesus had a third conversation with them: “*If anyone wants to be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross each day, and follow Me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*”

Those are 3 very intense teachings that Jesus is sharing as they walked along this 70-mile intensive “course” in discipleship. It was hard to understand; perhaps they even just stopped listening. On the one-hand, Jesus tells them that He is the long-awaited Messiah; but that He is going to die! Does that make any sense? How can the Messiah, Who was to conquer their enemies, how could he suffer and die? And after Jesus tells them that anyone who wants to follow Him could expect the same things to happen to them----perhaps Peter, James, and John were re-thinking their bold decision to leave their fathers, and their fishing professions behind, to follow Jesus; at the very least, they had to be confused and wondering what this all meant.

I think it’s really important that we keep all that in focus. That could very well be why Jesus invited these 3---His closest disciples----to stop walking, and start mountain climbing with Him to the top of the high mountain along the desert route to Jerusalem. And St. Matthew tells us that as soon as they get to the top, “*Jesus was transfigured before them: His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light*”. And not only that, Moses (representing the Divine Law) and Elijah (representing all the Prophets) appeared along with Jesus, and they were “*conversing with Him*”. And then, while Peter was saying how “*good it was that they were all there*”, the Voice of God came out of the clouds and they “*fell prostrate and were very much afraid*”, and they heard God say: “*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.*”

That was really the last thing they wanted to do---they had been hearing what Jesus was saying, but they didn't want to really listen to it; it didn't make sense to them; it was easier for them to just think, or talk, about something else----the weather, "springing forward", when they could go fishing the next time----anything but this. But now, they had seen Jesus Glorified; and they heard the Voice of God saying in no, uncertain terms Who Jesus IS, and what they were to do: "*Listen to Him*".

It was that same Voice of God that Abram heard in this afternoon's first Reading telling him to pick up his home, his family, and all his belongings and move to a foreign land. He was a 75-year old man. Who wants to pick up and start over at 75? But God told Abram to do that; and Abram "listened", and obeyed, and became the "father of Faith".

That was the Voice that St. Paul reminded us about in today's Second Reading too when he encouraged Timothy to "*bear your share of the hardship for the Gospel because (the Voice of Jesus has) called us to a holy life*".

That was the "Voice" that was speaking to the Apostles and telling them, that even though it didn't make sense to them, they still needed to "*listen to Him*". And even though Jesus is talking about "suffering, pain and death"----they were still being asked to "*listen to Him*".

God has called us into existence, and through our Baptism, Jesus has called us to follow after Him. Those "callings" are blessings---they are gifts of Grace. But when we are "called", we are obliged to "listen"---and to "obey" what God tells us. That's what's most challenging about "Discipleship". Discipleship is about so much more than coming to Mass, and obeying the commandments----that's the barest, most minimal response. But there's so much more.

Just as Jesus had done with His Apostles as they walked along the Journey to Jerusalem, Jesus calls us to those same, 3, critically important conversations: to 1) know, and be able to say, Who Jesus is in our lives; 2) to be able to understand why Jesus had to suffer, die and then be raised from the dead; and 3) to know, and to somehow embrace the fact, that when we follow Jesus, we too will in one way or another, to one degree or another, be asked to deny ourselves each day, take up our crosses---in whatever form or fashion they come into our lives, and follow Jesus to Calvary, and ultimately to Easter Joy.

The only way that we will be able to understand those 3, essential lessons in discipleship is if we too take the time to climb to the top of the mountain with Jesus, see Him for Who He really

IS, hear the Voice of God the Father identifying Him, and directing each of us as He did Peter, James and John---to "*Listen to Him*"!

That's what Lent is for at its deepest levels. It's not just about Lenten resolutions of denying ourselves sweets and snacks, spending more time in prayer, and trying to be more charitable in our works of mercy. It's more about "walking with Jesus", listening to His teachings, and with His Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, putting our Faith into practice in everything we do.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, please be clear that when we come to Mass, we're not just putting in time, or just fulfilling an obligation. When we come to Mass, we climb the Mountain with Jesus, and here, we see Jesus not just transfigured, but trans-substantiated; we not only see Him in glory, but we receive Him in His divinity to be our Food and Drink. We not only hear God's Loving Voice in His Word, but we are sent by Jesus Himself down the mountain, and back into our daily responsibilities and activities to bring Jesus' Love and Mercy to those we meet, especially those most in need.

Our crosses may be heavy, and the questions of our lives may be complex. That's when we come to the Mountain Top with Jesus and say with Peter: "*Lord it is good that we are here*". However, we will also feel Jesus touching us, saying: "*Rise, and do not be afraid.*"----*it's time to go back down.*

That's when we need to go back down the mountain, and continue walking with Jesus through the joys and the struggles of our Journey of Faith, as we deny ourselves, take up our crosses each day, and follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

God bless you, now and always!