

## 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Spirituality of Ordinary Time”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, this is my last weekend as your pastor of Saint Vincent de Paul parish. When I was assigned as your pastor, I quickly made so many goals for my time here. My plan was to keep myself busy with the hope to be here past my retirement age. I called it the “Vandenberg Plan”. As the proverb rings true, if you want to make God laugh, show him your plan. Since being named a bishop, I guess we all saw this day coming. However, I am very pleased by the archbishop’s decision to appoint Fr. John Patrick DePalma as your priest administrator this coming year, starting July 1<sup>st</sup>. He is a very good and caring priest. You will be very well served as Partners in the Gospel unfolds in the coming months. Fr. John Patrick, congratulations, and God speed! I am looking forward to my new assignment serving the archbishop as the southern regional bishop for the Archdiocese. St. Vincent de Paul is in my region, so you will still see me from time to time.

Yes, this month of June always catches me off guard, not just because it is a time of pastoral transition. We observed Lent, we celebrated the Easter Season, we celebrated the Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi...and now as Church we are celebrating, wait for it, drum roll please, Ordinary Time! Do these times feel ordinary to you? This might be evidence that the Vatican needs a new marketing plan when it comes to liturgical seasons. However, the way the Church calendar works, the feast day of the Baptism of the Lord is also the first Sunday of ordinary time. We continue with ordinary time until Lent begins which of course is determined by when Easter falls (always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox). Once the Easter Season wraps us with Pentecost, we have two more Sundays that have a special focus...then slam, back to ordinary time. Last weekend was the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday, and this weekend is the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday, there you have it. However, ordinary time it isn’t meant to be understood as mundane time. The word “ordinary” is used to mean counted time, as in ordinal numbers, you get the picture. Our days are numbered like the hairs on our head.

And so, what spiritual lessons are we given to consider this second week back into ordinary time? We are given the prophet Jeremiah who was a persecuted prophet of Israel, living in tumultuous times. He is rightly aware of the danger he was in, that there was terror waiting for him on every side. Even though he knows that he will likely be killed for being a prophet of God, he nevertheless has the courage to say, “The Lord is with me like a mighty champion...Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord!” That is what his faith was made of. Jesus challenges his disciples to have the same courage that Jeremiah articulates today when he tells them in our Gospel reading from Matthew, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” These are very challenging words, but nevertheless

helpful spiritual advice! Why? Because our days are numbered. We should therefore be challenged to live our lives with the big picture always in view.

What does that kind of faith look like? We could easily talk about any saint starting with Mother Teresa or St. Vincent de Paul; however, since I was once the director of the deacon formation program in the Archdiocese of Seattle, I thought I'd share a story about the patron saint of deacons, Saint Lawrence. St. Lawrence is a martyr of the early Church whose faith in Jesus helped win converts to Christianity during a time when it was illegal to be a Christian. Legend has it that when Pope Sixtus II was sentenced to be martyred, Deacon Lawrence wanted to die with him. The Pope however told Lawrence that although it wasn't Lawrence's time yet to be martyred, that his time would be coming soon, "in three days", he said. Talk about days being numbered! Meanwhile, the prefect of Rome called Lawrence to appear before him. The prefect believed that Christians were stealing the treasure of Rome and hoarding it. The prefect demanded that Lawrence hand over the treasure of the Church. Lawrence said that he would do so provided he was given three days, imagine that, and the prefect agreed. Lawrence went throughout the city and alleyways and gathered the poor, the blind, and the sick and, three days later, brought them to the prefect and said, "I present to you the treasure of the Church." This didn't go over well with the prefect and so he ordered Lawrence bound to a grate and roasted over a fire. Legend has it, Saint Lawrence told his executioners at one point, "I think I am done on this side. You can turn me over". How is that for faith!

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul". As heroic the story of Saint Lawrence's martyrdom is for us to contemplate, this kind of persecution is going on even today in many parts of the world as we all know. Their witness I think calls all of us to ask questions like, "What is my faith made of?" "What do I believe in really?" "Am I a believer in good times and in bad or am I lukewarm?" These are good questions to ask ourselves throughout ordinary time, a good examination of conscience this time of year, and a very good thought to consider for your former pastor moving into a new chapter in life as your regional bishop. This is because ordinary time is not mundane time, it is counted time. As disciples of Jesus, we rejoice in this rather than despair. Why? We rejoice because, although we understand that, like ordinary time, our days here are numbered like the hairs on our head, we also know where our lives are leading us. We live our lives with the big picture in view. Our future is the Kingdom of God and eternal life with Jesus Christ. This gives us hope. This can even give us the courage to pray every day in any given moment, and why not pray this with me now: Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen? Amen! Consider what that prayer just said: we give glory to God always, in our best moments and even in our worst moments. We give glory to God forever, because through Christ we will be welcomed into his eternal joy and world without end. Count that! That is where we want to be.

Thank you again for the privilege of being your pastor these past two years. Being your pastor, even for so brief a time, will be a memory for me that will last a lifetime. All I have left to say is, and I believe I say this on behalf of every pastor who has ever served you: May the good work that has begun in you be brought to completion, in the fullness of time, through Christ our Lord. Amen.