

The Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

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The Church of Jesus the Good Shepherd

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There are two things that annoy me greatly in this world. The first is when someone tells me how a movie ends that I have not seen, especially if it is one I want to see. The second and greater annoyance is when someone tells me how a book ends or will say, “I didn’t read it I looked at Cliff Notes” or “I just read the last chapter”. Those things drive me crazy because to appreciate the ending one must know the beginning and everything else that happened in between. There is nothing more enjoyable to me than to read a good book. To experience the development of the characters and the story. To try and figure out how it will end and to always be surprised with some new twist or turn. It engages the mind and the imagination. There is a satisfaction in knowing that you labored through the difficult parts and that you got to enjoy those parts that were a pleasure to read before you reached the

end. Because it makes reaching the end even better than it would have been or could be. The same can be said for our life of faith.

Our life of faith is a journey with a beginning, difficult times and moments of grace as we walk with God through this life towards the next. We must remember however that following God is not easy and because of this many just want to reach the end without laboring through the difficult parts but if you skip the difficult parts you will miss those amazing moments of grace as well. Elijah had been persecuted, he was pursued by the King and was hated by all those around him. He was despised not because of his personality or because he was not a likeable man but because he spoke the truth. It was because he proclaimed God's message to the people and it was not something that they wanted to hear. The reason they did not want to hear it was because it would require them to change their lives. It would require them to make sacrifices. It would require them to give up physically pleasurable experiences. It would require them to follow God closely and to do that is not easy. Elijah could testify to that because he was following God

closely and serving him with his whole life and being. He ran off into the desert just to preserve his life, but by the time he got to a place of safety he had lost all hope and just wanted to die. Elijah in his despair laid down and fell asleep. But then he experienced a moment of grace. The Lord sent an angel to provide him with the encouragement and nourishment he needed to continue following Him. Even though it is not easy to follow the Lord he provides us with what we need as he did for Elijah so that he could continue to serve Him.

Our tradition informs us that it has never been easy to follow God. From the first days of Christianity to this present day men and women have been persecuted and made sacrifices for their faith. They have been persecuted for being willing to stand up for the truth and in many places around the world even today it is still happening. Persecution and sacrifice are cornerstones of Christianity; the willingness of the people to make great sacrifices for the sake of the faith is one of the greatest characteristics of the Christian. It is hard at times for us to understand this notion. We live in a free society where our freedom to assemble and

worship is protected in the very document that governs our nation. That however does not mean that we are not called upon to make sacrifices for the sake of God. The legacy of this parish, the legacy that our founding members left us, the legacy that Fr. Moore instilled through his leadership, the legacy of the Church of Jesus the Good Shepherd is a legacy of sacrifice. From the first moment that men and women dreamed of building this Church in North Monroe they began to make sacrifice. They worshipped in conditions that were not ideal, they scrimped and saved, they gave of everything they had to make this Church a reality. They gave of their time, they gave of their talent and they gave of their treasure. I have been privileged to hear the stories of bake sales and fundraisers and what we have today is the result of hard work, prayer and sacrifice.

We must remember however that just because we now worship in this beautiful space and have educated the children of this area for 50 years it does not mean that the time of sacrifice is over. It would be disrespectful to the men and women who sacrificed so much to not

continue to honor their memory and legacy by failing to follow their example. All of them would have boldly told us in no uncertain terms that following God is not easy but they would have also told us that the grace they received and the reward of seeing their hard work come to completion was worth it. It was worth every privation and it was worth every sacrifice they made to build this parish. We are the heirs of those visionaries. We are the heirs of their work in making the kingdom of God a reality in this city of Monroe.

St. Paul tells us in his Letter to the Ephesians that we are to be imitators of God. The founders of this parish were truly imitators of God. They were imitators in that they were willing to make sacrifices for God's people and to bring his kingdom to fruition. They gave of what they had, the best of what they had to build this parish. God was willing to give of what he had, the best of what he had to save his beloved of people. He gave us his only begotten son. His son took flesh to be one like us in all things but sin. He lived amongst us and he suffered all our privations and difficulties. He knew our meanness and cruelties he

experienced some of them first hand but when the time came he did not hesitate to lay down his life for us. He did not hesitate to climb that dark hill to calvary and suffer his agonizing death upon the cross to redeem us. I do not believe for a moment that God would change it in any way. He knew the outcome of so great a sacrifice and it was so that we could become his adopted sons and daughters and enter the household of God.

We have been given a great example of an imitator of God in our lifetime. Her name was Agnes but most of us know her as Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa could have spent her life safely in Europe living in a well established community of religious women but instead she chose a different path. Instead she chose to follow God more closely and be an imitator of Him. She left everything and everyone she knew to travel to a far distant country. When she arrived in this country that was hostile towards her religion she founded a new order for religious women and set about doing the work of Christ. She cared for the poorest of the poor, the most despised in that culture. She bathed their wounds, she cradled them in her arms as they were dying and she

gave them back their human dignity. Mother Teresa was doing the work of God and against all odds and by making great sacrifices she was able to make the kingdom of God visible upon this earth.

Each and everyone of us gathered here have been blessed in one way or another in this life. We have been blessed with family and friends, we have been blessed with having enough to eat and decent shelter, we have been blessed with this Church. We have been blessed most of all in finding our way into the family of God. We are blessed that each of us are privileged enough to share in the bread of life and feast at the altar of God.

But with great blessings comes great responsibilities.

We are called upon to help make the kingdom of God a reality in our world and most importantly in the city of Monroe. All of us have been given talents. All of us have been given time and all of us have been given treasure. The greatest treasure we have been given is our faith.

We have also been given the great treasure of the Church. The Church's greatest treasure is the Eucharist, the bread of life. Because of this we

must each be willing to share this treasure with others. There is no greater gift that we can give than to share with others our faith. There is no greater gift that we can give than to help another find their way into the household of God and to be restored of their human dignity.

My brothers and sisters the time of sacrifice has come, the time to put aside our own wants and desires for the sake of building up the kingdom of God. Each of us knows what we can give, each of us knows the sacrifices we can make, and each of us must be willing to be imitators of God. We are the heirs of a great legacy not only as parishioners of Jesus the Good Shepherd but as Christians as well. Let us go forward with resolve to bring the Kingdom of God to fruition on this earth and in this city.