

Sunday, January 22, 2012 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Beginning of the Church Unity Octave

Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; Psalm 25; 1 Corinthians 7:29- 31; Mark 1: 14-20

Today we begin eight days of praying for and dialoguing about unity among the Christian churches. It seems that in order to bring about or deepen unity, whether churches, in a marriage, in community or parish life, we must change. Jesus' first words as he comes from his long retreat in the desert is "Repent." *Metanoia* in the original Greek means to have a change of attitude. Feelings and behaviors flow from thinking, psychology instructs us. Change our attitudes towards sinners as Jonah was called to do. The Ninevites changed their attitudes as well. Change our attitudes, exclaims the psalmist, and let God teach us God's ways. Change our attitudes toward the end of the world, Paul exhorts, which for some of us will mean a change from fear to joy, joy that Christ is coming to us. Jesus calls: "Repent", and more: "Believe the good news!"

What is the good news that you have discovered in Jesus? The communion antiphon, from Colossians 3, is a call to community through love and through the peace of Christ in our hearts. Pray to love more openly and more deeply. Pray for the peace of Christ in your own heart and in those of your loved ones and your enemies. Pray for unity within our church and among churches.

O God, hear our prayers and bring the hearts of believers together in your praise.. Heal all divisions among Christians, that we may move together toward justice and peace as one in your kin-dom.

January 23, 2012

2 Samuel 5: 1-7, 10; Psalm 89; Mark 3: 22-30

Who anoints us? First Samuel anointed David king-elect, chosen by God. In today's first reading, the elders of the community anointed him; and in the psalm, we hear that God anointed David. To be anointed is to be in Hebrew, *messiah*, *christos* in Greek. God anoints us in baptism; we are christ-ened through Christ's Spirit. To blaspheme against the Spirit, the unpardonable sin in today's gospel, is to speak against the Holy Spirit.

Let us praise the Holy Spirit who fills our every cell with life, energy, God's own love. Let us worship this "forgotten" one who has anointed us and made us Christ in today's world. Be still and breathe out any worries and then take a deep breath, breathing in the Spirit. Out with annoyances, and breathe in the Spirit who is peace. Out with petty judgments, and breathe in the Spirit who is love.

We praise and thank you, our God, for this great gift of the Holy Spirit who is transforming us, our world and its peoples day by day into Christ, from glory to glory.

Tuesday, January 24, 2012

2 Samuel 6:12-15, 17-19; Psalm 24; Mark 3: 31-35

We are not so far from Christmas. We remember today Bethlehem, the city of David where David dances before the Ark of the Covenant. David has pitched a tent to cover the Ark, the sacred box, just as according to John 1: 14, the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us. The gates of the city rise up as the King of Glory enters, a refrain we heard in Advent as we waited for the coming of Christ. Finally, Jesus creates a new family, all of us one in the kin-dom, all of us children of God who do God's will for *shalom*.

Where has the Word pitched a tent in your life? In your family? Your place of work? Your prayer corner? Your parish? Where do you find Christ in your ordinary time? Who is in the new family which Jesus has created? Look at each one and bless them with God's *shalom*: peace, health and well-being.

Thank you, Jesus, for loving us through so many diverse people. We raise our gates so that you may enter more deeply our hearts, our lives and our broken, weary world.

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

Feast of Paul, apostle and evangelist

Acts 9: 1-22; Psalm 117; Mark 16: 15-18

In Acts, Luke offers us three accounts of Paul's turning to Jesus, the one whom he persecutes when persecuting any member of Christ's body. This powerful experience becomes a touchstone for Paul's further activity. First he retreats for three years in the desert to ponder his call and then moves vigorously around the Mediterranean, an apostle (from *apostello*, one who is sent) and an evangelist (*eu-angelia* means good (*eu*) message (*angelia*)). For Paul, anyone who experiences that Jesus is alive and active, even if their experience is not so earth-moving as was Paul's, is thus called and consecrated apostle. How can we keep from singing? the hymn asks. To know Christ alive urges us to communicate him in every way we can.

When did you first know that Jesus lives? Return to that experience and savor it again. Let your gratitude flow. If you say you don't know in your gut that Jesus is alive, ask, beg, BEG for that experience right now. And don't stop begging until you know he is alive, with you, within you -- and then start singing!

A new song! We sing your good news, Lord Jesus! Thank you for sending us to all whom we meet today not only to speak good news but to be good news for the weary, the loveless and especially the unlovable in our lives. And in society.

Thursday, January 26, 2012

2 Timothy 1:1-8; Psalm 96; Luke 10:1-9

The gospel continues the theme of apostles, missionaries, traveling with the good news of

God's shalom, the kin-dom of God coming near. As the Alleluia verse proclaims: "God sends me to bring good news to the poor and freedom to prisoners." The Pastor who writes to Timothy repeats two of our themes from this week: strong emotion ("Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I might be filled with joy.") and from Sunday: change ("rekindle the gift of God that is in you").

For whom do you long so that you may be filled with joy? Remember and give thanks for those who are at a distance, for those who have died. How will you rekindle God's gift in you? Or can you? Ask the Spirit who came once as fire to set you ablaze, to set our church ablaze with new life and love and eagerness to spread the GOOD news to all creatures.

Thank you, our God, for calling us into your new family, the kin-dom of peace and joy. Rekindle in us your peace, your joy, your love, your Spirit. Fire us with love for your world!

Friday, January 27, 2012

2 Samuel 11:1-10, 13-17; Psalm 51; Mark 4: 26-34

Our first reading details one of the most famous sins in Judeo-Christian history, and it is not that David got Bathsheba pregnant. In our day we focus so on sexual sin, but the worse sin is that David covered up her pregnancy first by sending for her husband to have leave from his military campaign. Uriah did not sleep with Bathsheba. So David got Uriah drunk, and still he did not sleep with his wife. Finally David had him sent to the front in the war, and Uriah was killed. Adultery is not so much about illicit sex as it is about injustice (and in this case murder) against one of the couple. When David comes to his senses (and we will soon read that dramatic story) it is believed he composed Psalm 51: "My sin is before me always." At last, David won't manipulate and deny what he has done. "Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love and abundant mercy."

Today is the birthday of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whose personal life was in no way pristine, but who composed glorious church music. Someone said Mozart's music is the laughter of God. If you have some, play a piece of Mozart and listen for God's laughter, rejoicing in forgiving such a conniving sinner as David, such a weak sinner as Mozart and such a sinner as you!

Ave verum corpus! Behold the true Body! So Mozart composed, and so have we sung through the years. Behold us, O God, behold the Body of your beloved Jesus around the world, sinful and sincere, weak and wonderful. Thank you for your abundant mercy!

Saturday, January 28, 2012

2 Samuel 12:1-7, 10-17; Psalm 51; Mark 4: 35:41

How fitting that David who tried to trap Uriah is now trapped by the story the prophet Nathan tells him of an injustice done to a poor man. David is incensed: "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die!" Nathan responds: "You are that man." The psalm

continues a recital of David's repentance with three lines that deserve our memorization. The gospel tells of Jesus' deep exhaustion so that he slept through a storm at sea that frightened the fishermen.

Listen. Jesus says to us, as to his fearful friends: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Let that prophetic word sink in and convict you. Then respond with David's prayer:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and faithful spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence. Do not take your holy Spirit from me.

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and put a willing spirit within me.

Create in us clean hearts, new and faithful spirits that long for and work for unity among Christian churches and with every religion. Forgive our sins against the earth and its peoples..

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 18:15-23; Psalm 95; 1 Corinthians 7: 17, 32-35; Mark 1: 21-28

Governments all around the globe are fractured. There is disagreement about power and authority. Today we hear of another authority, one that stems from the Spirit moving in the heart of Moses, and the prophet whom God will send who will be like Moses. In Jesus' day, there was political and religious turmoil much like our own time, a questioning of Roman and Herodian power, a problem with religious authority. The people were on the lookout for a "prophet-like-Moses" to lead them. Paul used his authority clearly, much like prophets who were/are so close to the mind and heart of God that they dare to speak in God's name. And like Jesus, Paul did not want us to be anxious. Jesus came preaching peace, and casting out demons of anxiety which literally convulsed people. Those who looked on "were amazed and kept asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching, one with authority?'"

Are there demons of anxiety in you (or even perhaps hatred) that you want Jesus to expel today? Hear Jesus say to you: "Be still" and to whatever binds you: "Come out of _____!" If the Spirit has not raised up any unfreedom in your memory for you to present to Jesus for healing, then consider the meaning and the value of power and authority in your own life. Whom do you follow? Why? When and how do you use power and authority?

Thank you, Jesus, for continuing day by day in ordinary time to set us free from demons, whether interior or familial or societal demons which bind us. Preach peace to our hearts, please, right now. We need your authority.

Monday, January 30, 2012

2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16: 5-13; Psalm 3; Mark 5: 1-20

Yesterday we focused on the demons which Jesus continues to cast out. In David's case,

a man curses him. David, pursued by his own son Absalom in a grab for power, is weeping as he flees, and yet sees the “enemy” who curses and throws stones at him as a possible messenger of God. In Mark, Jesus meets another wild man who curses and takes stones to gash his own body, so possessed by demons is he. Jesus is not afraid “although no one had strength to subdue him.”

Ponder in your heart any times in your life when you felt cursed and stoned by others. If the perpetrators are still alive, pray for them, and ask the Spirit if there is any message from God in their persecution of you. Listen. If they have died, speak to them directly. Perhaps more often we have gashed our own selves. When have you despised your self, cursed your self? Focus now on your self, flawed though it may be, as a temple of the Spirit, and the embodiment of Christ.

Christ Jesus, give us the grace and graciousness to pray for our enemies. They are yours, and often, you speak to us through their harshness. Free us from harshness toward our selves.

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14, 24-26, 30-19: 3; Psalm 86; Mark 5: 21-43

What a wonder is the love of a parent for a child! Parents more easily than others surely know how unconditional is God’s love. It might not have cost Jairus, president of the synagogue, a lot to come to Jesus, begging for the life of his little girl. It cost David. How powerfully and unconditionally David loved his son Absalom, even when the young man raised an army against his father. News comes to David that Absalom has been killed. There is no relief in David, only grief. “Would that I would have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” In the gospel another character seizes center stage, a woman who must have been cut off from her children by a bleeding illness that would have isolated her from even her family. For twelve years she had been consulting physicians, but is healed by contact with Jesus.

How do you contact Jesus? When? Where? How? Although Jairus asks for help humbly and directly, this woman sneaks up behind Jesus. So sneak a peak every so often during the day; reach out and touch him. Often. Pray for parents and their children, especially those who rebel and those who are ill.

Jesus, thank you for your unconditional acceptance of us. How well you love us. Deepen our love for others, and teach us to love well. Give us the grace to pray for our enemies and wish them well.