

October 19, 2007 Memorial of the North American Martyrs

Reading 1 Rom 4:1-8

Brothers and sisters:

What can we say that Abraham found,
our ancestor according to the flesh?

Indeed, if Abraham was justified on the basis of his works,
he has reason to boast;

but this was not so in the sight of God.

For what does the Scripture say?

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

A worker's wage is credited not as a gift, but as something due.

But when one does not work,

yet believes in the one who justifies the ungodly,

his faith is credited as righteousness.

So also David declares the blessedness of the person
to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven

and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not record.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 32:1b-2, 5, 11

R. (see 7) I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Blessed is he whose fault is taken away,
whose sin is covered.

Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes not guilt,
in whose spirit there is no guile.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
my guilt I covered not.

I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD,"
and you took away the guilt of my sin.

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just;
exult, all you upright of heart.

Gospel Lk 12:1-7

At that time:

So many people were crowding together
that they were trampling one another underfoot.

Jesus began to speak, first to his disciples,

"Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees.

"There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed,
nor secret that will not be known.

Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness
will be heard in the light,

and what you have whispered behind closed doors
will be proclaimed on the housetops.

I tell you, my friends,

do not be afraid of those who kill the body

but after that can do no more.
I shall show you whom to fear.
Be afraid of the one who after killing
has the power to cast into Gehenna;
yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one.
Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins?
Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God.
Even the hairs of your head have all been counted.
Do not be afraid.
You are worth more than many sparrows.”
.....

“Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows”

A few days ago, when I went on the internet my eye was caught by a feature story on Yahoo about the top 10 occupations affected by stress and depression. Since we are coming into my time of year for that sort of thing, I decided to look at this story & see if “headmaster” showed up on the list. It did not, but I was struck by the #1 occupation category; it was bartenders and foodservice workers.

Now I vividly remember from my hotel days times when waiters were throwing plates at the cooks, and the cooks chasing the waiters with knives. Kitchens were dangerous places. And as a hotel manager, the only man I ever made cry was an exec. chef, who erroneously thought I didn’t like his food. Back then, however, I always dreamed, fervently wished, to become a bartender. It seemed the perfect job. The tips were great, the money was good, and just like on Cheers, everybody loves the bartender. Apparently that just isn’t so, or at least there is a lot more to it I never saw... The internet story did not elaborate, so I’m still in the dark on why my dream was so false. But it is clear that God saved from a dire fate when he called me here. I am pretty sure if I stayed a hotel manager or became a bartender as I dreamed, it would not have been good for me at all. The Lord works in strange ways, and of course so do human beings. We get very caught up in our own little worlds and cannot or will not see the big picture. Today we celebrate two events in the lives of

courageous persons who were willing to see the big picture and step outside of their familiar, little worlds.

The first event is the church's celebration of the North American Martyrs; we remember the first men to give their lives for the faith on this continent. They were Frenchmen, who came as genuine missionaries, not as companions of conquistadors, whose only motivation was love, to make Christ known to a people newly discovered by Europeans. Six were Jesuit priests, two were lay catechists.

The most remarkable of them, to me anyway, is St Isaac Jogues. Captured by the Mohawk Indians, he was tortured mercilessly for a year, witnessed the martyrdoms of some of his friends, and was kept as a slave. He finally escaped & took refuge in a Dutch Protestant fort, and was smuggled out and down the Hudson River to what is now New York City, the first priest ever to set foot there. From there he went back to France, safe at last from danger & his nearly fatal ordeals. But after a rest of only three months, he insisted on leaving, to return to his mission.

Back here in America, he volunteered to lead a peace mission to the Mohawks, which almost succeeded, but he was taken prisoner again, returned to the site of his previous imprisonment, and killed.

He had a supernatural courage and trust in God, a clear knowledge that what he was building was bigger and

more important than he. He was building the kingdom of God.

The second event we celebrate today...is us. This is our foundation day, our birthday.

On this date in 1955, at 3:50 PM three English Benedictine monks got off a train at St Louis Union Station and were driven out into the country; at 7 PM they arrived to take up residence at 500 S. Mason Rd in the now Switzer House, the original Saint Louis Abbey & original Priory School.

I'm pretty sure they weren't worried about Indians, but they had no idea what they were in for. It was a tremendous act of courage and self sacrifice for them to leave their home monastery, their home country, their home people and come to us to build up a small corner of the Kingdom of God. But they saw the big picture.

We thank God for them, and we are fortunate to have Fr Luke and Father Timothy still with us, two of our founders. It would be really great if as you see them around, to go up to them and thank them.

You may think...you may even ask... weren't these men (the martyrs & the founders) afraid ?

Isaac Jogues HAD to have been afraid to come back to the New World, HAD to have been afraid to parley with the very same men who had tortured him....

Fr Timothy and Father Luke, whose lives and country had been at risk in WWII just a few years before, whose lives had finally gotten back to normal and were going according to a timeless monastic plan... HAD to have been afraid to leave everything behind that was dear to them (except one thing) to come to a country to which they had never been, to a city they had never heard of to face an unknown future, one they had to build.

The one thing they did not leave behind, and which Isaac Jogues had with him at all times, the one thing – a person – was & is God, the same God who is with us today. The person who conquered their fears for them was God.

And God can and will do the very same for us, if we allow him to be in charge, if we will look at the big picture.

As it is in the gospel we heard this morning, one of Jesus' most persistent messages throughout the Gospel's, a critical part of the Good news is... Do not be afraid.

That's important, because we are all afraid of somethings; We all have anxieties, and if we don't get past them, they can keep us from doing or being anything, They can even kill us.

Of course we don't like to admit our fears & anxieties any more than we like admitting our faults & failures.

I know now, as I get closer to 60 & 70, I am afraid of all the negative effects of aging, the gradually increasing physical weakness and the loss of memory.

Like all of us, I'm afraid of failure. Like some of us, I'm afraid of heights.

I could handle these fears by becoming a hypochondriac, by getting a facelift, by never doing anything that could possibly fail, and by never leaving the ground floor.

Not only would I be of no help at all in building up God's kingdom, I would be totally self absorbed in my fears and not really living.

I'm sure the 7th graders had fears about coming here, but here they are. The 9th graders must have been very anxious about entering the high school, but here they are. As excited as the seniors are, they would not be human if they were not a little afraid of going to college. My young brother monks had to have been afraid to give up all they did to become monks, but here they are. Father Abbot surely took up his office in 1995 with great fear and trepidation, but he did it never the less.

Life is a risk, a dangerous place, and it comes with fears.

If we see the big picture that Jesus puts before us, we can conquer all our fears, the big ones and the little ones.

The most dangerous things, however, are things we may not notice and so foolishly have no fear of. Don't be afraid of dangers to your body and comfort Jesus says;

Be afraid of the dangers to your soul & spirit, of those things which endanger your eternal destiny and happiness.

Isaac Jogues knew exactly what the dangers were in the New World, and he knew they were ultimately unimportant. He was fortunate to recognize the dangers to his soul if he had stayed in France, where he was acclaimed as a hero & martyr before he was martyred. He knew that well deserved fame and adulation would have killed him for eternity.

It is only by faith, prayer, a relationship with the person of God, with Jesus Christ and his church, that we can recognize these dangers around us every day in our society & culture, and so take refuge from them in God. For if God is with us, who can prevail against us?

I thank God that I know Him & am in His church, that I serve him and am served and am safe in this community. I am truly blessed. I thank God, that you are here in this community, this school. You too are blessed, And I pray that the gospel you hear everyday here inspires each of you to faith and fearlessness,

- to trust in God as Abraham did (as we heard in the first reading)
- to recognize the real dangers in life (as Isaac Jogues did)
- and to build with your lives (as Fathers Luke & Timothy did) something great for you in God's eternal Kingdom.

You are worth more than many sparrows. Do not be afraid to fly like eagles.

Listen this morning for one of my favorite prayers, which the priest has the privilege to say, right after we all say the “Our Father”... Listen, & know that the priest says that prayer for you.

“Deliver us Lord from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin. And protect us from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ.”