

19th Sun. Ord. Time (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
August 6, 7, 2016

Ever since the first weekend of June, we have heard Scriptures from the gospel of St. Luke during our weekend liturgies. (I believe the Lutheran church has been doing the same; Presbyterian and Methodist congregations not so much.) At this point we have had 9 weeks of St. Luke, and if you look at the structure of St. Luke's Gospel, you would see that the major part of Luke's gospel account is devoted to what is called "The Journey to Jerusalem". This part of St. Luke's Gospel is 10 chapters long, and makes up nearly ½ of Luke's Gospel. More importantly is what these 10 chapters contain ...namely, Luke's discussion and teaching on discipleship. It maps out clearly what a disciple of Jesus should be and what a disciple of Jesus can expect from life. Essentially, it is all about mission ... remember how a couple of weeks ago I offered you some 'what ifs' ... what if we left here two by two with a mission for the week, and what if we returned the next weekend to report on how the mission went.

When we began reading from this section we read:

"Now it happened that as the time drew near for Jesus to begin his suffering and enter into glory, he resolutely turned his face toward Jerusalem."

Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem, and did so resolutely. He decided firmly. Nothing was to stand in his path. He had made a commitment to that goal ... to head in the direction of Jerusalem, which he knew would contain conflict and his own suffering and eventual crucifixion. Thus during the past weeks we have been asked by Jesus for the same resolute commitment:

"if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me>" (12th Sun.)

"Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of god." (13th Sun.)

"The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; ...go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves." (14th Sun.)

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (15th Sun.)

"There is need of only one thing." (i.e., being attentive to the Lord as Mary was) (16th Sun.)

"You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?" (18th Sun ... last weekend)

*And today, "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival."
(19th Sun.)*

Some say this is an impossible challenge ... Peter himself questioned Jesus about the demands he was making on those who were following him. We feel this is beyond us, or at best, meant only for a few. They completely dismiss the call to discipleship as having any relevance for them.

Others may hear and respond to the call, but not be resolute enough. Thus we find ourselves becoming sidetracked, distracted by the cares of the world. We bog down on our own journeys to Jerusalem, and we may even give up the journey. We get caught up in building bigger barns, and greater storehouses. We grow weary and tired waiting, and slacken up on the job.

These experiences remind me of the Parable of the Sower and the Seed: some seed falling on hard ground, some being scorched by the heat and cares of the day.

So what are we to do? St. Paul gives us an important teaching on this today. He teaches us that "faith is assurance". I can live for Christ because I have the assurance of God's promise. I can risk on behalf of my neighbor, because I have the assurance of meeting Christ in my service. I can enter into suffering, I can risk sacrifice – because I have the assurance that Jesus joins me in my suffering, and that dying to self grows into life.

Faith frees me from the many concerns and fears of life. Faith brings the peace and happiness that we want and that nothing else can give. But I cannot live for Jesus and live for the world at the same time. And it is here that we run into trouble We want to do both. Today's gospel cautions,

"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

A father was once reading a story about faith to one of his children. When finished, he asked his son, Jonathan, "Do you have Faith?" Jonathan replied, "No, I have toys."

The wisdom in the young boy's answer is startling: we can't have both. We will be either people of faith or people of the world. But faith is the assurance that it is okay and even wonderful to let go of the concern for earthly treasure and resolutely set our face (our lives) toward Jerusalem. It won't be without obstacles, and not without difficulty. But that is okay too! Faith is the assurance that life ends in glory that lasts if we live it with Jesus.

Maybe this is something to pray about when you spend time in church this coming Saturday night.