

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. of Ord. Time (A)  
Parishes  
January 21, 22, 2017

St. Athanasius and St. Francis

Fact Checking seems to be the thing to do today, so I do need to correct myself from last week. We heard from the Gospel of John last weekend, and I credited that to the shortness of Mark's Gospel, saying that we will be reading from Mark this year. I am correct in that Mark's gospel is short, and that we do use John to fill in. But ... we are actually reading from Matthew's Gospel this year .... as we just did now.

Today would be a good day to reflect on life issues. We are right on the date of the Roe vs. Wade decision. It was January 22, 1973. However, today's Scriptures are really perfect for a follow-up to last weekend's reflection on the Sacrament of Baptism. Gifted with grace and called to be a child of God, where do we go from here? In the gospel we heard St. Matthew's version of how some of the disciples were called: *"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."* Peter, Andrew, James and John left their nets and followed.

I begin with some words of Charles de Foucauld. When I gave the Knights of Columbus retreat last November, I used Charles de Foucauld as a model for being a Christian in the world today. These are some words that Charles wrote when he was on a retreat himself (1897): (Charles is sitting in a place near a tabernacle ....)

"O God, we should all sing the praises of your mercies – we, who were all created for everlasting glory and redeemed by the blood of Jesus, by your blood, my Lord Jesus, beside me now in the tabernacle. But if we all have cause to do so, then how much the more have I? From my childhood I have been surrounded by so many graces: the son of a saintly mother, who learned from her to know you, to love you, and, as soon as I could speak at all, to pray to you...

And the true piety of my upbringing! ... I see myself going to church with my father (and how long ago that is!) , and with my grandfather. I see grandmother and my cousins going to Mass every day. And my first Holy Communion, after a long and careful preparation, surrounded by the blessings and encouragement of a family wholly Christian, in the presence of those I loved best in all the world, so that on a single day there came together everything necessary to let me taste pure joy...

And then, when alas, despite so many blessings, I began to drift away from you, how gently you used my grandfather's voice to call me back to you. With what mercy you restrained me from falling into the ultimate excesses by keeping tenderness toward him alive in my heart."

Charles de Foucauld is so clear about how critical family is to the deepening, even to the continuance of faith in each of our lives. Faith is personal, but it must be witnessed to and handed on as well. Parents and sponsors say this when they baptize their children. It extends beyond parents to siblings: (A week or so ago, I mentioned in a Confirmation group I was part of how I remember a young high school boy saying in Reconciliation that he could have been a better older brother to his young sibling brothers. For a young man to have that kind of insight is amazing!) That is really witnessing and handing on the faith to others.

In the Rite of Baptism, beside the garment and the Oil of Chrism and water, we are each

presented with a lighted candle. The priest says, "Receive the Light of Christ – you have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as a child of the light. Keep the flame of faith alive in your heart. When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly Kingdom." The light of course symbolizes Jesus, who is the Light of the World.

Two of today's Scriptures – Isaiah's prophecy and our Gospel, speak of Zebulon and Naphtali. These are areas of Galilee, the northern province of the Israeli nation. For many reasons this area was associated with darkness –

- overcome many times by pagan nations, its people enslaved by tyrants.
- it location by the sea made it a center for trade and commerce, but thus also a land of many non-Jews – and a land of social injustice because of the pursuit of luxury. Moreover, the Jews who did live there failed to turn to God and keep their Covenant with God.

Yet it was in this very land, the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, that Jesus grew up, returned to after his baptism in order to begin his mission, and in which he would eventually make his final appearance to send the disciples out to proclaim the Kingdom he had brought. A light in the land of darkness! But what a difference the presence of the light made.

*"Darkness is dispelled ... Anguish has taken wing. The yoke of slavery, the rod of their taskmasters has been lifted. They are brought abundant joy and great rejoicing."*

In Baptism each of us is filled with Christ, the light that casts out darkness and we are given the vocation to live as light in the darkness. As Christian families you can be a testimony to the Light of Christ. And over the years special individuals within our families have truly inspired us. How many of us do not remember and wonder at

- parents whom we saw kneel at their bedsides before going to sleep at night
- a mother or a father who sat us on their lap to read to us about Jesus or tell us about a saint.
- a grandparent whom we thought was just sitting silently for hours in their chair, only to learn later that they were doing much more than sitting ... they had been praying for us, their children and grandchildren.

Marvelous lights in the darkness .... all of them.

And the faithful witness of these wonderful family members was often inspired by the similar faithful witness of religious – sisters, brothers, priests who connected with them in their parishes or schools.

50 years ago at the dinner for my First Mass, I gave this little talk ... "Your priest wants to help you and lead you to Christ. This is my only wish – that the years of my priesthood may help you to love Christ more, and to love and respect his priesthood. If we do, he will continue to give it to others from among those we love. For I am a priest today, Fr. Jim and Fr. Vern, because this parish and our entire family have loved one. Mother and father, brother, Wayne

- grandmother – her life a prayer and an inspiration
- my pastor – whose interest, concern, would give any young man a respectand love for the priesthood
- priests, sisters all of you.

Can we be faithful today? ... will our children be faithful tomorrow? Will the light of Baptism lead and guide us

through the darkness into the glorious light and love of God? Today Jesus says, “*Come follow me – the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”