

Sunday Homily Helps Lectern Guide

INTRODUCTIONS TO PENITENTIAL RITE AND READINGS, MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

The INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE is a model which can also be adapted for use as an introduction to the liturgy itself. The INTRODUCTIONS TO THE READINGS, if read by priest or lector before the respective readings, are intended to focus the attention of the listeners. The MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS relate to the theme of the homily outline and may be used to supplement the usual petitions.

August 3, 2014 — 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: We come today with hunger in our hearts, like the crowd of five thousand that followed Jesus. We long to hear his word. May he remove from our hearts all distractions and inclinations that would keep us from experiencing his merciful love.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet invites people to walk the way of life. God provides for all their needs.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul reminds us that God's love for us is a gift that comes through Christ. Nothing outside us can separate us from God's steadfast love.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus abundantly feeds more than five thousand people with only five loaves and two fish.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) That we realize more and more the immensity of God's love for us,
- 2) That the love we experience in this Eucharist extend beyond us to all we meet today,
- 3) That those who feel unloved and abandoned know the love of God from which nothing can separate us,
- 4) That victims of violence, hatred, and war find relief from suffering and experience peace of soul,

August 10, 2014 — 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Jesus is our food for the journey and our God who wishes to save us. Let us admit our sinfulness and ask him for an increase of faith.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, the prophet Elijah learns to listen to God in a new way. Sometimes God speaks in whispers.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul expresses his anguish that so many of his people have not accept-

ed Jesus. In enumerating Israel's many privileges, Paul puts Christ at the top of the list.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus reveals himself to his disciples as the Son of God.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For all who are fearful on their journey of faith,
- 2) For those who face danger and peril for their faith,
- 3) For those who are wrestling with spiritual demons trying to destroy their faith in Jesus,
- 4) For our brothers and sisters who find it hard to believe in the goodness of our God and who, like Elijah, want to quit the journey,

August 15, 2014 — Assumption

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: As we gather today to celebrate this feast of Mary's Assumption, we ask God's forgiveness for the times we have failed to recognize the poor, the oppressed, and the outcasts of our society.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, the darkness of this world cannot prevail against the heavenly woman and her son.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul reminds us that Christ has been raised from the dead. The Church teaches that Mary enjoys the full benefit of Christ's resurrection and has been taken body and soul into heaven.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, John the Baptist pays homage to Jesus while still in the womb. Mary proclaims a ministry of grand reversal for her yet unborn son.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For Church and civic authorities, that they lead with care and compassion,
- 2) For the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and those who are exploited by others, that they be nourished by the generosity of those of us who have plenty,
- 3) For an end to bias, racism, and prejudice,

- 4) For the courage to be open to the Holy Spirit's plan for us,
- 5) For peace and an end to war, terror, and hostility,

August 17, 2014 — 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: As believers in Christ, we are the equivalent of the gentiles to whom Paul preached the Gospel. While we have no right to claim entitlement to God's kingdom, we can accept it by acknowledging our dependence on God and our need for humility and forgiveness.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet challenges the people to put their faith into practice. God's temple is a place of prayer for everyone.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul reminds both gentiles and Jews that they have been disobedient to God. It is the mercy of God that can bring both to salvation.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus is confronted by a Canaanite woman. Her strong faith persuades Jesus to heal her daughter.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For our pope, bishops, priests, and all who serve as prophets, teachers, and spiritual leaders, that they humble themselves before God, the source of their strength,
- 2) For those who feel disconnected from God, that they persist in believing and accepting God's love and forgiveness,
- 3) For the poor, the hungry, the sick and dying, that they have faith that Jesus will hear them and provide nourishment, healing, and eternal life,
- 4) For all who suffer because of the color of their skin, their ethnic origins or their inability to fit in, that they persist in recognizing their own worth and eternal value,
- 5) For all who sincerely seek God's truth, that we will realize our common origins and destiny,

August 24, 2014 — 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We ask forgiveness for not always living up to this faith.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, God provides the people with a faithful servant who will do what is right and just.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul marvels at God's wisdom. It is impossible for humans to comprehend the mercy God shows to Jews and gentiles alike.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Peter confesses Jesus as the Son of the living God. Jesus declares to Peter that he is the rock upon which he will build his Church.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For the Church's unity and concord in Jesus' name,
- 2) For the conversion of governments that work against the faith of the people,
- 3) That the ill and suffering sense God's comfort and presence,
- 4) For those whose compassion taught us to know Jesus as divine and human,

August 31, 2014 — 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Crosses are part of life. We ask forgiveness for the times we have refused or complained about our crosses.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet reflects on his service to God. He must speak the truth even if it leads to personal discomfort.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul sums up the holy life of a Christian. It is due to God's mercies and includes the total gift of self to God.

• **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus declares that he must suffer, die, and be raised up. Disciples must lose their lives for Jesus' sake.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For Christians who suffer persecution for their faith, that they hold firm in the face of every trial,
- 2) For the grace to support our fellow pilgrims in the crosses of life,
- 3) For those who endure criticism for doing what they believe is right, that they have the courage to persevere,
- 4) For the conversion of sinners,

Sunday Homily Helps

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 3, 2014

Series A readings

Lectionary #112

Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 55:1-3

This oracle neatly summarizes Isaiah's oracles offering comfort to a people who endured so much hardship. The prophet urges the people to trust in God's saving word. The prophet also challenges them to set aside their limited view of things and accept the vision God has in store for them.

1) *Invitation.* The reading begins with an invitation for the people of the earth. The prophet, speaking for the Lord, invites the thirsty, the hungry, and the poor to seek what they need from God. For too long, the people exhausted their resources seeking nourishment and security in the wrong places. The kings of Israel could not provide such things for their people because they failed to place the things of God first. The policies of kings like Ahaz and Hezekiah failed to give the people what they really needed. They wasted the resources of the kingdom on what could satisfy the body but not the spirit. In the end, the kingdom collapsed and the people went into exile. Far from their homeland, they longed for the good things of the promised land.

2) *To life.* Isaiah announces that the wine and the milk of the promised land are now within their reach. All they have to do is serve the Lord. If they listen to the wisdom of God, they will discover all the advantages that eluded them in the past. The blessings of the covenant, so long ago promised to David, are still theirs to enjoy.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Rom 8:35, 37-39

1) *Love.* Paul speaks of "the love of Christ." The context tells us this is Christ's love for us. At the end of the passage, he speaks of "the love of God (the Father) in Christ Jesus our Lord." Thus, Christ's love for us originates in his Father.

2) *Paul's point.* Nothing outside ourselves can separate us from God. Only by abusing our freedom can we fall from God's grace.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 14:13-21

1) *The setting* for this wonderful and miraculous feeding is the wilderness. Jesus went there when he

heard about the death of John the Baptist. Crowds are depicted as following him into the wilderness. Any mention of wilderness brings up memories of the Israelites, Moses, and their many trials or experiences in the wilderness. With only this much information, we have a sense that something unusual is going to happen. Jesus' immediate response to the people is compassion. He seems to have a deep sense of knowing what they are seeking, and he feels for them. His first gesture is to cure their sick, making them whole again.

2) *The miracles.* Evening comes, and the disciples make the suggestion that it is time to send the people away so that they might make provisions for their evening meal. Being in the wilderness without food is indeed a precarious situation. Jesus was expected to confirm this suggestion as a good idea, but he did not.

In fact, his response must have sounded ludicrous. "Give them some food yourselves." The total supply of food available amounted to five loaves and two fish. Undaunted, Jesus took the bread and fish, blessed them, broke them, and had the disciples distribute them to the people, all of them, 5,000 plus. Not only did everyone get their fill, there were twelve baskets full of leftovers.

3) *Meaning.* Historically, it is useless to ask how Jesus did what he did. We do not know, and the text does not tell us. Rational explanations are interesting, but they miss the point that the Gospel is making. What we do know is that this event reminds us of those messianic banquets mentioned in the OT. It reminds us of the great feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness with manna. It reminds us of the miraculous feeding done by Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:42-44.

It also reminds us of the special way Jesus fed his disciples at the last supper. In every case, the emphasis was on abundance. This is how God who has compassion on the people cares for them. In faith, we believe that no matter how precarious the situation might be, we can always rely on God's care. Jesus, the Son of God, clearly manifests that with the feeding of the 5,000 plus. Not only that—the compassion and care will be in abundance.

PURPOSE: To become more aware of and grateful for God's compassionate love.

SUMMARY: There are many ups and downs in life. Christians have their crosses to bear, but God is always present with love and strength.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** A woman lived in a simple apartment, caring for her frail husband day and night. Having suffered a catastrophic stroke, he was helplessly bedridden. His loss of comprehension was so great that he thought his wife was his mother. The visitor commiserated with the woman and said: "This must be very hard for you." The woman replied: "If you love someone, you'll do anything."

B) **APPLICATION** God is love. God promises to lavish us with care. Jesus feeds us out of loving compassion. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1) God promised to satisfy Israel.

- a) For ancient Israel, getting enough water and food was a daily struggle. They lived in a dry climate, which made them treasure every drop of rain. They were at the mercy of insects and enemies that could destroy or steal their crops.
- b) The promise of abundant grain and ample water, wine, and milk—all for free—must have sounded like paradise to them.
- c) The Lord asks them to come heedfully and listen, that they might have life. These blessings would come, if they were open to renewing the covenant.

2) Jesus shows compassion by feeding the five thousand.

- a) A feast of bread and fish in a deserted place was a very unlikely prospect, especially when only five loaves and two fish were all the food available. The disciples must have been shocked to hear Jesus say: "Give them some food yourselves."
- b) That crowd got fed, and twelve baskets were left over. Jesus not only fed them. He stuffed them. They ate well and delighted in rich fare, as Isaiah had foretold.

3) Matthew and the three other evangelists who tell this story have more than earthly food in mind.

- a) Jesus in the desert is the new Moses. The bread he gives is reminiscent of the manna, as John's Gospel makes explicit.

b) Jesus looked up to heaven and said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. How familiar those words are. We will hear almost the same words in a few minutes, when the priest says them in recounting what Jesus did and said at the Last Supper.

c) As amazed as the crowd of five thousand must have been, we should be even more amazed. As comforted as the prophet Isaiah's hearers must have been, we should be even more comforted. Jesus feeds us not with bread and fish, but with his Body and Blood.

4) When you love someone, you will do anything for them.

- a) Jesus loves us and gives himself completely to us. He gave his life for us on the cross. He gives himself to us as food. He does everything for us.
- b) St. Paul revels in this love in today's selection from the Letter to the Romans. Christ's love is so great that nothing on earth or in heaven can separate us from it. St. Paul knew this by experience. He had been through anguish, distress, persecution, nakedness, and peril. The sword eventually separated his head from his body, but not his heart from the heart of Christ.
- c) Knowing how much Christ loves us should give us great comfort. We may not suffer everything St. Paul suffered, but we do have our crosses. Through everything, the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord does not cease.
- d) St. Paul was also declaring that he would never stop loving Jesus in return. Our gratitude for God's compassionate love should enable us to make the same declaration.
- e) We should be willing to do anything for the one we love.

C) **CONCLUSION** May the sentiments and words of St. Thérèse of Lisieux be ours: "My beloved, supreme Beauty! / To me you give yourself; / But in return, Jesus, I love you: / Make of my life a single act of love."

D) **TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** With love, Jesus breaks the bread for us today. Let us enter completely into this banquet of love (*agape*) and pledge our love to him.

(Rev. Paul J. Schmidt)

Sunday Homily Helps

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 10, 2014

Series A readings

Lectionary #115\

Exegesis of the 1st reading, 1 Kgs 19:9a, 11–13a

Threats from Queen Jezebel, angered over the killing of her prophets, have filled Elijah with fear. He escapes to the desert where he asks God to take his life. He is convinced he can no longer serve God effectively, declaring he is no better than his dead ancestors. In this state of mind, the prophet falls asleep in the shade of a tree as he waits for God to grant his request.

1) *Food.* A messenger approaches. For a moment it appears Elijah will get his wish. But this messenger comes, not from the court of Jezebel, but from the court of heaven. The angel sets food and water before Elijah and orders him to rise, eat, and drink. Heaven is clearly interested in keeping Elijah alive. But the prophet appears to be unaware of God's purpose or chooses to ignore it. After his meal, Elijah simply goes back to sleep again, still clinging to his request to die.

2) *For a journey.* A second time, the angel brings food and water for the prophet. This time Elijah discovers that God is nourishing him because he must make a journey. The food and water are enough to give him strength for a 40-day journey. In the Bible, the number 40 is often associated with some sort of transformation. Elijah is to make his way to the mountain of God. Mount Horeb is the same mountain on which Moses once stood and interceded for the people of Israel after the great sin of idolatry with the golden calf (Ex 32). It may be that God has a lesson in store for Elijah on that same mountain. In any case, God will clearly not grant Elijah's request to die.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Rom 9:1–5

1) *Paul's love for his people.* In hyperbolic language, Paul expresses his anguish that the Jewish people did not put their faith in Jesus.

2) *The privileges of Israel.* Paul enumerates seven special gifts that the Israelites enjoy. He expresses his hope that they will come to enjoy the greatest gift of all: Christ, a son of Israel, who is "God blessed forever." The text appears to be a reference to Christ's divinity.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 14:22–33

1) *An epiphany.* This particular story of Jesus walking on the water is rich in its possibilities for meaning. Time is not well spent trying to figure out what kind of historical reality lies behind this story. The meanings are found in the story itself—not in attempts to recreate what might lie behind it. First and foremost, the story emphasizes Christology. It is an epiphany story that reveals the divinity of Jesus. In response to the fear of the disciples seeing Jesus coming to them walking on the water, Jesus declares, "Take courage, it is I . . ." This is the same way God revealed the divine identity to Moses on Mt. Sinai, "I am who am."

2) *Meaning.* Some see the image of the boat in this story as symbolic of the Church at the time this Gospel was written. Like the boat, the Church was experienced as being battered by the waves of chaos and at times appeared to be sinking. Just as God in the OT is portrayed as conquering the raging and chaotic waters seeking to destroy creation (Ps 107:23-32), so Jesus is conquering the sea that threatens to destroy the boat containing the frightened disciples.

3) *Peter.* Unique to Mt's Gospel is the incident about Peter wanting to walk on the waters and come to Jesus. Some see this as Peter's desire to share in Jesus' power. He wants to do what God alone does. He fails because his faith is not sufficient. But in response to his cry for help, Jesus saves him. The lesson is our need for a strong faith. Another way to look at this story is to remember that Peter wants to come to Jesus on the waters in order to prove that Jesus is who he says he is.

Perhaps the reason Peter began to sink so quickly is that he never should have attempted to walk on the water in the first place. Peter cannot do what God can do. Peter's real challenge was to have the faith that could recognize Jesus as the divine one and to accept Jesus' self-revelation. In this, Peter failed as he put God to the test. Perhaps Mt is telling his community that when life in the Church gets challenging and even dangerous, it takes strong faith to stay and ride out the crisis. That is not the time to get out of the boat. Those who do will sink. The Son of God will save us. He is also in the boat with us.

PURPOSE: To present Jesus as the food for our journey.

SUMMARY: Matthew places today's story of Jesus walking on water after the miracle of the loaves. Like Elijah who was miraculously fed for his journey to Mount Horeb, Jesus, as the God of creation, is food for our journey to his kingdom.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** As a new school year is about to begin, summer travel is coming to an end. Perhaps some of us were able to do some significant journeying this summer; perhaps some of us stayed near home and viewed some local sights. But whether we went near or far, we checked our resources, did some planning, and made sure we had food for our travel. As Christians, we are on a life-long journey to the kingdom of God; Jesus is our strength and food for that journey.

B) **APPLICATION** Today's story of Jesus walking on the water has had many interpretations because it deals with an "unearthly" event. Jesus, a man, walks on the sea. And even the apostles find it frightening, for they cry out that it is a ghost that they are seeing.

1) The Church pairs this story today with the story about Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb as he flees for his life from the anger of Queen Jezebel.

- a) Elijah feared for his life and asked God to end his life before the forces of Jezebel caught him. He was desperately afraid and dejected.
- b) But instead of taking his life, God sent an angel with food and drink to strengthen Elijah for a journey to Mount Horeb, the mountain where God had spoken to Moses.
- c) There God would reveal his new work for Elijah as a powerful prophet. There was more to be done in God's name.

2) Our readings today imply that there is more work for us to do as well.

- a) As a Church, as God's people, we are called to be the presence of Christ in our day-to-day lives.
- b) Pope Francis has made it very clear that Christianity is much more than a system of beliefs; it is a way of life. It is a very active, involved way of life that requires the use of every spiritual resource that is available.
- c) As God and man, Jesus is our strength, our primary resource, and our example.

3) Jesus not only has the ability to feed us; he can save us from the very powers that try to overwhelm us.

- a) Jesus is God. He is creator and Lord of creation. Even though he is a human being, he is also the Lord of the universe.
- b) He is food for our journey as he gives us his Body and Blood to sustain and strengthen us.
- c) He is the one who can reach out and save us from powers far bigger than we are—just as he reached out and saved Peter.
- d) Neither hunger, nor thirst, nor the powers of an angry queen, nor even the powers of a raging storm can overwhelm us if we but have faith in Jesus our Lord.

C) **TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**
We don't know exactly what happened that day when the apostles saw Jesus walk on the water. We don't know how the bread and wine we are about to offer can become the Body and Blood of Christ. But we do know through faith that our God is one who wishes to save us, not only from physical dangers, but also spiritual danger that can distract us on our journey to his kingdom. As we come here in faith to offer this magnificent Sacrament of the Eucharist, we are nourished and strengthened for the journey.

(Don Miller, OFM)

Sunday Homily Helps

Assumption
August 15, 2014
Annual readings
Lectionary #622

Exegesis of the 1st reading, Rv 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab

This book proceeds in sevens, seven being a number suggesting perfection. It begins with seven letters urging Churches in Asia Minor to remain faithful to the Lord. Following these is the breaking of seven seals on a scroll featuring especially the Lord's faithful witnesses who have won the victory. Then comes the sounding of seven trumpets calling humanity to repentance so they, too, may share in the victory of the Lamb.

The scene in this reading follows the final trumpet heralding the age of the Messiah. Only here in the book is the ark of the covenant visible in the heavenly temple. The sight of it signifies that God has not forgotten the covenant. Vivid images follow.

1) *Woman*. First appears a woman surrounded by the lights of the sky. She is thus connected with the realm of God and stands in clear contrast to the beasts emerging from land and sea in the next chapter. This woman represents God's holy people and especially Mary.

2) *Dragon*. Also appearing in the sky is a huge red dragon. It wars against the light, sweeping down to earth a third of the stars. The dragon represents the prince of this world, determined to oppose God's saving work and to shed the blood of the saints. The dragon attempts to devour the Christ, but it cannot. Jesus wins the victory over death and ascends to the throne of heaven. The community of faith remains in the world. She flees into the desert where God protects her and makes her strong.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Cor 15:20–27

1) *Christ's resurrection*. Jesus is the second Adam, the new representative of the human race. By his death and resurrection, he has undone the death-dealing sin of the first Adam.

2) *Christ the firstfruits*. Paul sees Christ's resurrection as the firstfruits of those who have died, assuring us that all who follow him will be raised at the end of time. Contemplating Mary's role in the mysteries of Jesus, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believes that Mary has already been taken body and soul into heaven.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 1:39–56

1) *Visitation*. Today's Gospel contains two parts. The first part describes a visitation Mary, pregnant with Jesus, makes to Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist. The purpose of this story is to have the unborn John pay homage to Jesus while both are still in their mothers' wombs. Lk has consistently pointed out throughout this chapter that Jesus is superior to John. Jesus is the Son of the Most High while John is the one who prepares the way. It is Elizabeth, now filled with the Holy Spirit, who recognizes all this and pays homage to Mary, the mother of the Lord. Notice this story is also about the encounter of two sacred physical bodies. Mary's body is considered so sacred by the Church that, for centuries, it was understood that at death her body was assumed into heaven.

2) *Magnificat*. The second part of the Gospel focuses on an ancient hymn proclaimed by Mary. For centuries, this hymn has been known as the "Magnificat" and has been part of the Church's official liturgy of the hours (Vespers). The opening of the hymn highlights Mary's special role as a lowly servant of the Lord. She considers her service to be a great honor—not because of her, but because of the special child to whom she will give birth.

The hymn then quickly moves away from Mary herself and focuses on outlining what is going to happen when Jesus, the Son of God, comes into his own. His life and ministry will create nothing short of a revolution. Monumental reversals will take place. Those who are powerful and rich now will then be brought low. Their thrones will vanish, and the rich will be sent away empty. On the other hand, the lowly will be raised up, and they will be filled with good things. In Jesus the Lord, the promises made long ago to the ancestors will faithfully be brought to fulfillment. They are being asked to believe the unbelievable.

Throughout both sections of this Gospel, Mary has been the leading character. However, from beginning to end, the story is about Jesus. She has served the Lord by giving him bodily birth. The Church today pays her homage by honoring her body and her person through the celebration of her assumption.

PURPOSE: To help the assembly see that Mary's Magnificat is also their prayer.

SUMMARY: Marian doctrine and devotion, properly understood and practiced, does not lead believers away *from*, but rather, more deeply *into* the mystery of Christ.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** There is an old story about a workman on a scaffolding in the nave of a cathedral who looked down and saw a woman praying before a statue of Mary. As a joke, the workman whispered, "Woman, this is Jesus." The woman ignored him. The workman whispered again, a little more loudly, "Woman, this is Jesus." The woman ignored him again. The workman whispered a third time again more loudly, "This is Jesus." And again the woman ignored him. Finally he said aloud, "Woman, don't you hear me? This is Jesus." At this point the woman looked up at the crucifix and said, "Be quiet, Jesus, I'm talking to your mother."

B) **APPLICATION** The Magnificat was not created by Luke out of the blue. It is quite likely, though, that he was using some very reliable information about Mary's spirituality, mindset, feelings, and concerns to feel confident that the words of the prayer captured the fundamental spirit of what Mary was about and what her Son would also be about.

1) The actual text of the Magnificat is rooted in the Song of Hannah (1 Sm 2:1-10).

- a) In the Song of Hannah, we find God depicted as the great equalizer.
- b) The Song says, "He raises the needy from the dust . . . to seat them with nobles and makes a glorious throne their heritage."
- c) Hannah, like Mary, knew that those who created the oppressive structures and produced suffering for so many would, in God's plan, have their fortunes reversed.
- d) Mary responded to Gabriel by calling herself the handmaid of the Lord. Hannah, too, referred to herself as a handmaid of the Lord.
- e) Both Mary and Hannah speak for the outcasts of society: the oppressed, the weak.

2) Mary's Magnificat contains the theme of joy.

- a) This theme of joy is directly related to the prayer's principal message—the reversal of destiny for the lowly and the hungry.

- b) To try to subdue the proud, the strong, and the wealthy and, in turn, to exalt the lowly and to give every good thing to the hungry, God brings confusion to the proud, dethrones the mighty, and sends the rich away empty.

3) In light of the Magnificat, we are called not only to glorify Mary, but to follow her in this process of affirming the poor and calling for God's justice and equity as people made in God's image.

- a) We may prefer, or find it easier, to refer to Mary as Queen—a leader with power—but she is also lowly.
- b) We may also prefer—as the Litany of Mary names her—Gate of Heaven, Tower of David, Mystical Rose, Virgin most pure, but we should never lose sight of her life on earth in the poor town of Nazareth.
- c) That image is also Mirror of Justice—spokesperson for the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the outcasts.

4) As disciples of Mary—the first disciple—and of her Son, we, too, are called to be Mirrors of Justice, making the Magnificat our prayer, as we pray:

- a) That we may reflect Mary's strength.
- b) That we be strong (yet gentle) leaders, bringing Christ to others as Mary brought him to her cousin's family and ultimately to us.
- c) That we discern God's will in our lives and with Mary say yes to whatever God asks.
- d) That our lives be always joy- and praise-filled, knowing that the promise made to Sarah and Abraham of old will be realized in our lives.
- e) That we always show mercy to the oppressed, the poor, the outcasts; feed the hungry; and bravely challenge the establishment.

C) **CONCLUSION** We are called to make the spirituality that Mary proclaimed in the Magnificat the central spirituality for ourselves and the whole Church. This is our challenge.

D) **TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** As we prepare to celebrate the Eucharist, let us resolve to live the message of today's Gospel and with Mary say: "My life glorifies the greatness of God."

(Sandra DeGidio, OSM)

Sunday Homily Helps

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 17, 2014

Series A readings

Lectionary #118

Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 56:1, 6-7

The opening line of this reading is a good summary of Isaiah's many oracles. He calls on people to concentrate on what is right and do what is just. Justice and righteousness were the very things God looked for in the famous song of the vineyard from chapter five of Isaiah. Now the prophet's message comes full circle as he returns to this theme in the closing chapters of his book.

1) *The nations.* A surprising element in this familiar message is the addition of the nations. From the very beginning, God's plan reached beyond the chosen people to embrace all the nations of the world. Israel was to serve as a beacon of light to show the way for the rest of the world. So the prophet announces that foreigners will be included. If they love the name of the Lord, they, along with Israel, will be regarded servants of the Lord.

2) *The mountain of the Lord.* God's people were privileged to have the sabbath day, a day set aside each week to step away from mortal agendas in order to recognize the sovereignty of God, who made all the rest possible. For ages, the sabbath was a tradition distinct to the chosen people. But in this oracle, the sabbath is declared available to all. The nations will join the celebration on Mount Zion. They will be welcome in the house of the Lord. Their sacrifices and offerings will be acceptable to the Lord.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

1) *Apostle to the gentiles.* Paul is very aware that God has called him to preach to the gentiles. He reminds them that they had been disobedient, but can now be saved by the mercy of God.

2) *Paul and the Jews.* The Jews, too, were disobedient. As a whole, they have failed to recognize Jesus as savior. Paul sees God's mercy working for the Jews insofar as the conversion of gentiles can spark a holy jealousy among the Jews and bring them to Christ.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 15:21-28

1) *An unusual event.* The story about the Canaanite woman confronting Jesus raises many questions in the minds of interpreters. Does Jesus intend to shun her? Is his reference to dogs a derogatory slur? Did this event really happen? Our approach is to stay with the story as Mt tells it. The woman is a Canaanite, which means that she is a gentile. She desperately wants Jesus to heal her sick daughter. She seems to know who he is and even refers to him as Lord, Son of David. This would be understood as a faith affirmation. More than this we do not know.

Ordinarily, Jewish men and gentile women would not converse together, and so Jesus does not immediately respond to the woman. The disciples want her totally out of the picture. For some reason, Jesus eventually responds to her, indicating that his mission was to Jews only. This does not deter the woman. In fact, it seems to energize her into pleading with him even more to help her.

This time, Jesus seems to deflect her pleading with a rather harsh statement about not throwing food intended for children to the dogs. This should have discouraged her, but it did not. In fact, she fires back a response that seems to catch Jesus off guard. She will settle for the scraps if that is all there are. Jesus concedes her the victory in this contest. Her faith is overpowering, and Jesus cannot let that go unrecognized. He will gladly grant her request, and thus her daughter was healed.

2) *A story of faith.* Whatever might be the historical facts behind this story, the way Mt tells it clearly makes it a story of faith. This woman is driven by faith from beginning to end. Because of this faith in who Jesus is and what he can do, she will not be put aside by anyone. Remember, she is not fighting for herself; she is fighting for the life of her daughter. The power of her faith makes her willing to risk insult, encourages her boldness, gives her a sense of empowerment, and ultimately brings about the transformation she seeks.

There are numerous stories of faith similar in form to this one. Mt told this story to encourage his community members to strive for this kind of faith. He also wanted to teach a lesson about the power of faith. Faith can clearly bring power to the powerless.

PURPOSE: To recognize the power of faith and persistence despite circumstances and conditions that appear to be hopeless.

SUMMARY: Jesus frequently encountered people who, despite the odds against them, pursued him with requests of various kinds. Today's Gospel teaches us that, no matter who we are or where we are coming from, we will be rewarded for perseverance.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER The late South African civil rights leader Nelson Mandela was known for holding onto his ideals and principles despite the odds against him. As a result of his efforts to abolish his nation's policy of racial separation, he was arrested and convicted of conspiracy against the government. During his 27 years in prison, Mandela's reputation as a symbol of resistance continued to grow. Following his release, he was elected president of the country and even honored with a Nobel Peace Prize. After his death last year, Mandela was honored by people around the world for accomplishing what had appeared to be impossible.

B) APPLICATION Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is portrayed as one who encouraged and rewarded persistence.

1) The prophet Isaiah called on his people to concentrate on doing what is right and just.

- a) Isaiah promised that the Lord would bring justice and salvation to his people.
- b) God's plan of salvation would include not only those known as the "chosen people," but all who love God and follow God's will.
- c) Isaiah declared that foreign believers were welcome to all the benefits and privileges that were distinct to the Jewish people.
- d) The prophet made it clear that God would likewise honor the sacrifices and offerings of non-Jewish believers.

2) Paul saw himself as the "apostle to the gentiles."

- a) Paul found joy in his ministry of converting non-believers into believers.
- b) He saw value in causing his fellow Jews to envy non-Jews who became believers.
- c) Paul made it clear that those who were disobedient to God and rejected God's gifts through Christ could still be saved and share in the resurrection.
- d) Paul emphasized that salvation for Jews and non-

Jews alike is available only through God's mercy.

3) Despite the social conventions of the times, Jesus gave in and answered the request of the Canaanite woman.

- a) Although she was a gentile, the woman called out to Jesus as "Lord, Son of David."
- b) She equated her daughter's illness with possession by a demon, indicating that the healing she needed was more than physical.
- c) Jesus seemed to discourage her by stating that his mission was for the "chosen people" of Israel.
- d) Jesus challenged the woman by comparing her with giving good food to dogs.
- e) The woman would not take "no" for an answer, saying she would take whatever scraps Jesus could share.
- f) As a result of the mother's faith and persistence, Jesus declared the daughter healed.

4) Persistence and faith are no less valuable traits today.

- a) With the advancements of our culture and society, it is often even more difficult to believe in a personal and loving God.
- b) In our fast-paced society, we are not used to waiting for anything.
- c) We tend to feel entitled to success, money, material possessions—even health.
- d) Despite all the advantages we experience, we can still feel lost and disconnected from our true selves and the source of our existence,
- e) Those who persist in believing and trusting God will find themselves rewarded with inner peace and an assurance of ultimate well-being.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST
Recognizing our dependence on God and our common bonds as God's people, we approach the Lord's table to celebrate the presence of Christ in our world and in each of us.

(John E. Hingsbergen)

Sunday Homily Helps

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 24, 2014

Series A readings

Lectionary #121

Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 22:15, 19–23

This oracle features two characters who work from totally different ends of the moral spectrum. Both serve, it seems, in the court of the indecisive King Hezekiah. The king wavers between seeking security for his kingdom from other nations or from God. This oracle should enlighten him on which is the better choice. If the king were to listen to the prophet and choose God, his kingdom would truly be secure.

1) *Disgrace*. As master of the palace, Shebna likely decided who had access to the king and who did not. His chief interest, it seems, was in promoting his own career. Verses omitted refer to a grand residence he had commissioned for himself. The prophet satirically refers to it as a tomb, a place more suited for the dead than for the living. Isaiah warns that God will remove this pompous official from his station. He is not serving the interests of the people.

2) *Honor*. Shebna's place will be taken by Eliakim, a man who will serve God. He will wear Shebna's robe and sash; he will have Shebna's authority. But unlike self-absorbed Shebna, Eliakim will be generous and caring, "a father" for the citizens of Jerusalem and its royal house. God will use Eliakim's wisdom to shield the king from policies harmful to the country. Because of his commitment to the values of heaven, Eliakim will enjoy security beyond anything this world could offer. His family will find honor in the service he gives God and country.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Rom 11:33–36

1) *The mystery of God*. Paul marvels at the wisdom and knowledge of God. He refers to Job 38:2 and Is 40:13 (among many others) to express his wonder.

2) *God's mercy*. Paul especially recognizes that God's mercy trumps the disobedience of both Jews and gentiles. Only an inscrutable God could come up with such a plan.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 16:13–20

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, plays a very important role in the Gospel of Mt. The basic tradition is borrowed from

Mt's Gospel, but Mt has reshaped it significantly. This becomes clear with the confession itself. Mk's "You are the Christ" is expanded to, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mt expands this even further to indicate that Peter's insight into Jesus is a revelation from God.

1) *Peter a rock*. Mt inserts at this point a tradition about Peter that is not found in any of the other Gospels. Apparently, making a play on the Aramaic words for *Peter* and *rock*, Jesus declares Peter to be the rock upon which he will build his Church. This is one of two times the word "church" appears in the Gospels, both times in Mt. An assurance is given that the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against this Church. Reflecting OT and rabbinic tradition, Peter is also granted the keys to the kingdom of heaven and the ability to loose and to bind. What does all of this mean?

2) *Peter's successors*. Almost all mainline scholars agree that Jesus appointed Peter to a special position among the twelve apostles. The debate among Catholics and Protestants is whether Jesus intended this special authority to be passed on to Peter's successors. Catholics say yes while Protestants say no.

3) *What kind of rock?* Without getting into that debate, it is very interesting to note that this special position granted to Peter does not change him very much. If he is to be understood as a rock, it certainly is not a strong, hard piece of granite. Peter retains all his human weaknesses. Shortly after this event, Peter will argue with Jesus over the meaning of being a Messiah. He will deny Jesus three times when Jesus needs him most. He will remain a person of "little faith." Peter is a very porous, soft rock.

4) *Faith and service*. Mt could have easily made Peter into a strong heroic leader, but he did not. Leadership in the Church is not about power and glory. It is about faith and service. At times, Peter's human weakness will overcome his little faith, and he will fail. He always manages to regroup, reassert his faith, and continue on. He knows that his only power and strength come from Jesus himself. This is why the Church built upon Peter will persevere.

PURPOSE: While God remains inscrutable and beyond our certainties, we experience God's presence as very much alive through our very human experiences of Jesus.

SUMMARY: Many people had an opinion about Jesus' identity, but Peter reached beyond his own frame of reference to confess that Jesus was not just another good man. In Jesus, God has personally entered our world as a human being. Even the disciples did not understand his message and purpose. We're all still trying to discover who Jesus is and to understand the saving power of our God in the weakness and humility of the Son of God.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** The Indian story of seven blind people asked to explain what an elephant is "like" assumes that whatever "part" he/she could feel by hand was all there was. One said it was like a snake because he felt only the trunk; another, grasping the legs, declared the animal a "tree trunk," and so on. The seventh blind person took the time to pet the elephant, to walk all around it, to smell it, to feed it, and to listen to the sounds it made. As he heard the others argue about who was right, he smiled because he was the only one who still had absolutely no idea exactly what an elephant was like.

B) **APPLICATION** Parts of our life experiences inform our frames of reference, but all the parts don't necessarily mean we understand the whole. It's really a no-brainer that faith, culture, and personal experience affect us differently, and we do not always see the complex whole of the issues we feel so sure about. God chooses all-too-human vehicles to loosen our judgments and bind us to faith in him.

1) Who do people say that the Son of Man is?

- a) Some say John the Baptizer, looking for a stern challenge to repent; others say Elijah, wanting a Messiah who marks the kingdom's arrival; some point to Jeremiah, a prophet to tell it like it is.
- b) Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Though a simple fisherman, this rock of faith did not come to this insight on his own.
- c) Despite his confession, Peter was yet to be bewildered by Jesus' betrayal, death, and resurrection.

2) Who do we say that Jesus is?

- a) Some say that he is a wise and holy man; others

point to a peacemaker and promoter of justice; some say he is the king to be worshiped in mystery.

- b) Some spread the propaganda of a man whose disciples fabricated a resurrection.
- b) Paul writes that God's ways are beyond us, but Jesus is the center of all that is or will be. It takes a world of experience finally to see God's life in Jesus beyond our limited awareness.

3) God's message comes in messengers of God's choosing.

- a) In Isaiah, Shebna was the master of Hezekiah's palace, but he was full of his own glory. God was not impressed, and would not tolerate a traitor to his people.
- b) Eliakim is a faithful servant who will be a father to the people.
- c) The power of the keys was the power to allow or deny entrance to the palace to get the king's ear.

4) For Paul, God's ways, though inscrutable, are clear—in and through the life and person of Jesus.

- a) Jesus' life was a perfect expression of God's desire for his people.
- b) Disciples are not to be stingy with God's compassion and mercy as the people seek him and knock at the kingdom's door in Jesus.

C) **CONCLUSION** The Lord calls us to a renewed faith in God's active presence in our world, but challenges us not to stop short of our own vision. Parts we experience can look as though the world is going to hell in a handbasket. Partial experience makes us believe Jesus is present in our opinions, but he has left the rest of the world high and dry. We're invited to loosen the blocks we put on God's work so that we can bind our lives to faith in a God whose will is not exactly our own.

D) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

As we come to Communion today, our communion in the Spirit is much broader and varied than the people we see in the Communion line. The kingdom is God's reign over all human hearts. And humanity's varied cultures, races, languages, and experiences form a seeming cacophony of insights. It all comes together at Communion in a living people, living complex lives, whose unity in Jesus brings his Body—human and divine—to life anew.

(John Petrikovic, OFM Cap.)

Sunday Homily Helps

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 31, 2014

Series A readings

Lectionary #124

Exegesis of the 1st reading, Jer 20:7–9

Jeremiah's oracles include these unique personal reflections on the task of prophecy. In his service as a spokesman for God, Jeremiah had to endure real hardships. Every one of God's prophets certainly had his share of difficulties. But only Jeremiah's book offers such candid reflections on them.

1) *The servant*. In verses immediately preceding this passage, a priest of the Jerusalem temple had Jeremiah confined to the stocks. Jeremiah's warning about the collapse of the kingdom did not reach sympathetic ears among the established personnel in the temple. They regarded Jeremiah's words as treasonous and demoralizing. They could not see that Jeremiah was speaking for the true King of Israel; therefore, his words were anything but treasonous. While confined to the stocks, Jeremiah was subject to ridicule and laughter from the people who gathered around to watch. Little wonder he surrenders to the very human emotions expressed in this reading.

2) *The word*. Jeremiah admits in this reading that he even entertained the notion of simply not speaking for God at all. Silence would at least offer him a break from the verbal abuse he had to endure each day. But Jeremiah soon discovered that God's word had to prevail. Jeremiah was foolish to think he could ignore speaking the truth. He had to speak the word of God, even if it led to personal discomfort. As God had said, Jeremiah was fashioned in the womb for this very purpose.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Rom 12:1–2

1) *Mercies of God*. All the good that comes into human lives derives from God's goodness. Due to God's mercy, the Christian life can become a spiritual sacrifice.

2) *Spiritual worship* includes the gift of one's body, renewal of one's mind, discernment of God's will, and the ability to do what God wants.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 16:21–27

1) *A suffering Messiah*. Peter has just confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In

response, Jesus has appointed Peter to a special position among the twelve apostles and as the foundation upon whom the Church is to be built. Now Jesus confides in his disciples what it means for him to be the Messiah. What Jesus says is totally shocking.

It contains nothing of the varied traditions regarding the coming Messiah. Instead, Jesus describes a Messiah who is to suffer greatly, be killed, and on the third day be raised. So unbelievable would have been the references to suffering and death that they probably missed the mention of being raised.

Peter is beside himself and immediately reprimands Jesus for proclaiming such nonsense. Jesus, in turn, rebukes Peter, declaring him to be Satan. This has erupted into a serious argument. If we had been there, most of us would have been squarely on the side of Peter. A suffering and dead Messiah would be a total contradiction beyond our comprehension.

2) *Discipleship*. Jesus follows this up with a teaching about discipleship as the way of the cross. Contrary to almost everything the disciples were striving for, Jesus emphasizes that discipleship is about shedding the old life aimed at acquiring power, glory, fame, and fortune. That leads to nothing.

It is only when one sheds oneself of that phony, inauthentic, but ever-attractive life that one will find real life. This real life is life lived by self-giving, through service to others, in imitation of the life of Jesus. It is a life rooted in Jesus and not in self-promotion. For a disciple, authentic life is modeled on the way of the cross. The good news is that the cross does not end in death. The cross leads to new life—unlike anything a person could earn or procure for oneself.

The life that a disciple is being encouraged to lose is actually no life at all. But it is only when one has the faith to abandon that inauthentic life that one can experience real living. This was not an easy message for Peter or any of the disciples of Jesus to hear and understand. It went against almost everything they had been taught. In many ways, we all find ourselves in the same situation with Peter and the other first followers of Jesus.

PURPOSE: One of life's mysteries is that a grace awaits us if we carry our cross, just as resurrection awaited Jesus after he died.

SUMMARY: We do not have the perfection of God. So, in the lives of each of us, there may be something painful, big or small—something we wish to be different. In the lives of each of us, there are crosses.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** A nun was explaining the Stations of the Cross to her class. When they got to the fourth station where Jesus, on the road to Calvary, meets his mother, the nun explained that, even though they could not talk to each other, mother and son simply used their eyes. "What do you think they said to each other?" she asked the pupils. The students gave many different answers. One child suggested that she said, "This is unfair." Another child suggested that she said, "Why me?" Finally, a sickly little girl raised her hand, got up, and said, "Sister, I know what the Blessed Mother told Jesus. She said to him, 'Keep on going, Jesus!'" Why would a mother encourage her only son on the way to crucifixion to keep on going? Because a mother understands the Christian principle of "no cross, no crown."

B) **APPLICATION** The gospel of Christ is a coin with two sides: the cross and the crown. If we try to embrace the glorious side and reject the suffering side, we falsify the gospel. The same Jesus who said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" [Matthew 11:28] also said, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." [Matthew 16:24-25].

Do we come to Jesus then to be freed from our burdens, or do we come to take up the cross? We come to Jesus to be freed from our meaningless and futile burdens and, in their place, take on the cross that leads to salvation. Today's Gospel challenges us to say no to the very attractive but one-sided worldly gospel of instant glory, a sugar-coated gospel offering the false promise of "no cross, all crown."

1) If we try to escape the cross, we may experience anger.

a) We ask: "Why me? I didn't deserve this. " Asking "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" is a natural reaction.

- b) We see Peter reacting like this when Jesus says that he is going to suffer and die in Jerusalem.
- c) In coping with our crosses, we may get angry with others, or even angry with God. It is easy to blame God when we cannot understand why we are in pain.
- d) Blaming God who did not cause our cross is unjust, just as blaming others who are innocent is unjust.

2) After feeling anger towards God or others, it is possible to experience anger with ourselves because of our cross. Anger turned inward is called depression.

- a) When we move beyond anger with ourselves or depression, we can arrive at where the cross was meant to lead us all the time—grace.
- b) We can discover a grace in God's plan for us because of our cross.
- c) After dying on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead. When we run away from the cross, we run away from grace.
- d) Any cross is painful, and we need to pray fervently, for it is with prayer and the help of other people that we can carry our crosses.

3) If our cross is particularly heavy, it may take a long time for God's grace to sink into our hearts.

- a) Grace will help us work our way through all the thoughts that go on inside us until we arrive at acceptance.
- b) After the cross come the graces of new life, praise, and thanksgiving.
- c) Now we can say, "Thank God, I have come through it." We know we are healed; we know we have experienced the power of God's grace, and we can say, "Thank God."
- d) The particular grace we receive is often in proportion to our cross. If we know the pain of being hurt by others, we end up being more sensitive to others and not wishing to impose hurt or injury on others.

C) **TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**
The crucified, glorified Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist. It is here especially that we can receive the grace, the strength, to carry our cross. It is here that we grow in faith, hope, and love—convinced that the cross leads us to new life.

(Brian P. Maloney, OFM)