

2nd Sunday in OT Cycle A January 15, 2017

As you walked into the church this evening/morning, my guess is that you could not help but be struck by the relative bareness of the sanctuary.

Gone are the white and gold vestments – we wear green again - the nativity figures, lights, Christmas trees, and other reminders of the season are gone.

Maybe these annual trappings of Christmas have been packed away at your house as well.

We have entered once again into what the Church refers to as Ordinary Time.

Of course we must never let our faith in Jesus Christ become “ordinary”.

The readings this weekend, remind us of the “extraordinary” nature of our faith.

The prophet Isaiah in the First Reading tells us that God called us before we were born. Life is sacred and precious from the moment of conception. St. Paul tells us that we are part of a church – a community God has formed for His people.

The Gospel gives us John the Baptist as the model of a servant of God, so dedicated that he could recognize God’s chosen one, and so humble that he could step aside when the time came.

We are led then into Ordinary Time by reflecting on who we are called to be as Christians.

Being a follower of Christ is not a solo performance. We are called together in community; and like John the Baptist, we are called not just for ourselves, but to be able to point out the Lamb of God to others.

The ancient Israelites thought of themselves as the Chosen People. They were the recipients of God's special love and care.

But the great prophets of ancient Israel – including Isaiah - proclaimed a new understanding of the covenant. The children of God were to be a "light to the nations" so salvation could extend to the ends of the earth.

This remains our mission today – to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone, everywhere.

In the Responsorial Psalm we sang asking to do God's will. When we truly feel that God is speaking directly to us, we can only answer, "Here I am Lord; I come to do your will." Maybe this should be the song of Ordinary Time.

When we pray those words we are promising to participate in the mission of Jesus – to put our own lives on the line.

Our extraordinary faith calls us to echo the Baptist's Cry – actually we repeat it at each Eucharistic liturgy to this day: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

"The Lamb of God" is in our midst at every mass: in the Word proclaimed; in the Eucharist we receive; and in the presence of our brothers and sisters.

Our challenge each week, each day is to behold, with eyes of faith and spirits of hope, the Lamb of God among us, here and now, in our kitchens and classrooms, in our work places, and out on the street; to "behold the Lamb of God" in the conflicts and complexities of our time.

To do God's will is to bring the light of God's mercy and compassion into times and places that seem devoid of God; it is to perceive the light of God's grace even in the life's darkest moments.

It can be done.

Monday we celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who spent a lifetime bringing light into the darkness of racial segregation and discrimination.

While sitting in a jail cell in 1963 he wrote, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

On Friday we will see a new president inaugurated but we will also face a still much divided country. So we very much pray for a spirit of cooperation and respect for one another and for all human life, as good stewards of the gifts God has given us.

We pray as well for our new President, to have before him at all times the charge to protect and defend the rights of all, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

The Christ to whom we commit ourselves is someone who was born into history, at a specific period of time, in a particular place. He was known by real people like John the Baptist. He had followers who testified to the truth of his life.

What does this tell us? It tells us that history is important. It tells us that the ordinary events that make up life are sacred.

It is within these moments that we love those in our lives with the love of God that we treat others with the compassion of God – even those with whom we disagree.

Throughout Ordinary Time we as followers of Jesus must always return to the events of His life in order to discover the meaning of our life.

There are times when we may cry out “I don’t see him.” There are other times when we can see and feel the light of Christ shining upon us.

But it is Christ who comes to us, no matter where we are in our lives.

And what is our response: “Here I am Lord I come to do your will.”