

[Readings: Is. 57:15-19; Ps. 85; Phil. 4:6-9; John 14:23-29]

Most of us probably remember learning at least part of the Declaration of Independence in school. The one in which Thomas Jefferson wrote: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

What we might NOT remember learning in school, however, are the principles upon which our Founding Fathers and Mothers built this nation, the foundation of faith our country was founded on. One of our first great leaders, John Adams, once stated:

“The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity. I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God.”

The following prayer was found in President George Washington’s prayer journal. It beautifully illustrates Who our ancestors were looking to for guidance as they were building a new nation on a foundation of faith, “under God.”

“Oh, eternal and everlasting God, direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the Lamb and purge my heart by Thy Holy Spirit. Daily, frame me more and more in the likeness of Thy son, Jesus Christ, that living in Thy fear, and dying in Thy favor, I may in thy appointed time obtain the resurrection of the justified unto eternal life. Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind and let the world be filled with the knowledge of Thee and Thy son, Jesus Christ.”

Let us give thanks for our country’s Founding Fathers and Mothers for building this country on a foundation of faith. Let us thank God for this committee of men and women and thank Him for working through His people to lay a solid foundation of faith, structure, unity, and love for US citizens.

But also, let us not forget that our ultimate example of selflessness is given to us by Christ. [Galatians 5:1](#) says, “For freedom, Christ set us free.”

Christ died to give us freedom, and because of this, we can celebrate by praising God for His love, shown when He hung on the cross, gave up His freedom and died so that we might live. [John 3:16](#) reminds us that “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

It seems that every time we turn on the news we hear about war and crisis in countries around the world. But we don't have to live in fear. When our faith is centered in Christ, we can have a sense of peace that only comes from knowing that our times are in His hands. When our security comes from a faith in God's perfect plan for our lives, we can experience peace as we think about the future. God is forever faithful so that we can find our strength in Him. As Jesus said in [John 16:33](#), “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”

We live in an ever-changing world -- one that, at times, just makes no sense. From natural disasters to terrorist attacks, hate crimes and unmentionable acts of violence, we get the in-depth report from every news outlet in the United States. And, we watch these special reports, trying to find some kind of reason for the craziness, some perfect explanation for why these things happen and who is responsible and how can we make a difference. And, while we will never get all the answers on this side of eternity, we know that as Christians, we are called to trust God, share His love and pray. [Philippians 4:6](#) says “Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” With this in mind, let us pray...

Dear God,

As we face these uncertain times in our nation, we ask you, Lord, to dwell among us. We are comforted by the knowledge that You alone are our Savior and Lord, and the ultimate Master of life. We trust our nation to Your loving care, Lord. Send Your Spirit to touch the hearts of our nation's leaders.

Give them the wisdom to know what is right, and the courage to do it. Give us Your light and Your truth to guide us in our ways so that we may seek Your will in our lives and impact the world around us for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Let us also remember that there are men and women far from their families and the comforts of home today -- missing hugs and kisses, birthday parties and baseball games, praying for a safe return to the country and the people they love.

These are United States military; some are our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, grandchildren, parents, neighbors, classmates, friends. Others we have never met, but they risk their lives daily for our freedom, and there are so many who have risked their lives for our freedom in many years past. For them, too, we now pray:

Dear Lord,

Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the men and women who serve our country now and in the past, and for the sacrifices their families make so that we can all enjoy the blessing of freedom.

We praise You for calling them to help protect us, and for giving them the courage and ability to do their jobs well.

Guide their choices and their actions, Lord. Help them to see You working in their daily lives, whether in the field, at home, or abroad.

Surround them with Your mighty angels; protect them in Your mercy; cover them with your grace.

Guard their hearts while they are far from loved ones, and bless them with moments to cherish when they are together.

Hold these families close, Lord. May they look to You for the strength and peace that only You can give.

In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

[Readings: Isaiah 66:10-14c; Psalm 66; Gal 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20]

I love seeing babies at church. Thank you to the parents who bring them to worship with us. I know it takes a lot of work getting ready at home to come to church. And a lot of work watching over the baby during Mass. How can you not pay attention to a newborn -- yawning, scrunching her little nose up, or trying to jam a fist into his mouth? And when they're a bit older it's fun to watch them look around from their perch in Mom or Dad's arms, taking in the lights and colors and strange people, making noise in our acoustically perfect space, their eyes wide with curiosity. My favorites are the ones who are totally collapsed onto their parent's shoulder so we get to see their sweet sleeping face so full of contentment. As the parents walk their children around the back of church or up to Communion or sway to the music while still in the pews, the child's every need is met and the little one is content and satisfied and living in the now.

In fact, the First Reading this week from Isaiah proclaims a promise from God that those who are faithful will be comforted, fed, carried in God's arms, and filled with joy so that we can collapse, like contented newborns, into God's care.

Yes, I love watching babies at church, and after hearing Isaiah describe God's promises, I now know that it's a flesh-and-blood meditation on God's total love for each and every person -- even you and me.

At the other end of the spectrum, time has snuck up on us. With each passing year, I hear older men and women admitting that they are no longer able to carry the load of big family dinners. Older parents are asking for help more and more with holidays and other celebrations. The next generation of sons and daughters steps in. Old recipes are shared. Grandma and Grandpa step back in letting their adult sons and daughters handle it all, never looking over their shoulder or correcting them. It was now their turn. They look on with love and gratitude. When asked how it feels to pass the torch on to another new generation, they eagerly reply: "Blessed. How blessed I am by God." No matter what pain we encounter in life, we are blessed.

We are the children of God. It is the same blessing that God gave the chosen people, his family, in today's scriptures that is given to us.

As the head of your spiritual family, I am responsible for encouraging you to be active family members, evangelizers and good stewards of our resources. Last Monday, we began a new fiscal year, July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020. If you look at the Support Report for the last fiscal year in next week's bulletin, you will see that we were \$7,700 short in our Sunday collection budget. I am asking you this new fiscal year to consider increasing your weekly support by \$3.00, starting with this month. For four weeks, put an extra \$3.00 in your church support envelope each week, so that we can begin our new year in the black. I thank you for your sacrifice.

In his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), Pope Francis describes one of the temptations of Christians today. Rather than experience the joy of the Risen Christ, the gift of divine love that dwells among the human family, we may focus exclusively on the difficulties. We become those perpetually stuck in Lent, with sour faces and sad demeanors. We're sorrowful sourpusses who emphasize the bitterness of life, of our nation, of our Church. Since Pope Francis wrote this encyclical in Spanish, I am still waiting for the official Latin translation to come out, so I can see how they translate "sourpuss."

We, of course, are right to mourn over such moments. To be sorrowful that so many politicians, clerics, business leaders and folks in the Church have failed. We can and should do better.

But we also must acknowledge the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. That this Church -- sometimes really bad at living out the Gospel -- also has transfigured creation. This is why it's good for us in America to hear from Our Lord about the successes of evangelization and the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the world. Our Lord sends his disciples out on a perilous journey (cf. Lk 10). They're sent with little. As I am packing for my summer vacation, the words, "Take no money bag, no sack, no sandals sounds pretty appealing to me to "travel light!"

They expect little success, only trouble. But the 72 disciples come back proclaiming the Good News of joy, success and divine glory. Through the name of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit given by the Father, the demons have given up their project. Divine love has won.

Even in the midst of scandal and sin, we should remain hopeful in this fact. God does not abandon us. God never forgot Jerusalem, even when she sinned over and over, but always promised to call her back, to enter again and again into union with her. God hoped in Israel. God hopes in the Church. God hopes in us.

Of course, Jesus reminds us that the success of evangelization is not that the demons respond to us! The success of evangelization is that our names are inscribed in heaven. We return to the original vocation that God intended for us: to become those made for praise. We become ciphers of love unto the end.

Thus the Church — even in the midst of our scandal caused by clerical malfeasance — needs to rejoice. We need to rejoice that so many religious women and men have brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the ends of the earth. They have preached the Good News of justice and divine friendship to the poorest of the poor. They have lived with the poor, transforming their lives. We need to rejoice that there are so many baptized, lay Catholics who have raised holy families. They have preached the Gospel in their neighborhoods, in their parishes, in their workplaces. They have created a culture where divine love has become incarnate in space and time.

We need to rejoice that there remain holy priests, holy bishops, holy deacons who have lived out their vocation of love in hidden ways. We need to rejoice, not because the Church is remarkable or worthy of such praise. Rather, we need to rejoice because such success is, in fact, evidence that God is the source of power -- not us. Definitely not us.

What a merciful God to include us in this work of evangelization. AMEN!

[Readings: Gen. 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Col. 1:24-28; Lk. 10:38-42]

A popular song decades ago – and sometimes still gets stuck in our heads – is “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” Today’s readings might be called, “Don’t Worry, Be Fearless.” Look at today’s First Reading. Abraham is dozing under a tree on a hot desert day when God arrives under the guise of three silent figures on the road. Does Abraham prostrate himself at their feet and remain in an attitude of perpetual adoration? Does he beg for wise teaching or seek moral instruction about certain matters pertaining to his neighbors in Sodom and Gomorrah? No, he springs into extreme hospitality that would have made Martha of Bethany envious. Even Martha Stewart might not have seen to the slaughter of a whole steer for the occasion, but when it comes to hosting, Abraham belongs in the hospitality Hall of Fame. The preparation of the steer also clues us in to the timetable upon which this meal depends. Abraham is banging pots and pans for quite a while before he exchanges one word with his august company. And this would have been in keeping with the Jewish moral code, which placed hospitality

In return for his hospitality, Abraham’s guests finally speak and promise him the one desire of his heart: a son. All of this is a long way of saying that once upon a time, God appreciated a good meal from a dedicated host. It would seem that “Mary’s way” is not always deemed the better part.

In today’s Second Reading this weekend, we hear Saint Paul say that in his sufferings he is “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His Body, which is the Church.” This can be a confusing teaching, after all how could anything be lacking in Christ’s sacrifice? Our Lord’s sacrifice upon the Cross was, of course, perfect and of infinite merit. His Blood atones for the sins of the world. That said, Jesus Himself, calls us to take up our crosses as we follow Him. While Christ’s offering of Himself to the Father was sufficient, we are still called to offer the sufferings that we bear in union with the Cross that Christ bore out of love for us.

This passage from Saint Paul reminds us that the crosses in our lives are not meaningless. If we use our cross to unite ourselves with Christ Crucified, our

suffering is transformed into an act of love for God. Christ willingly bore His Cross and laid down His life for us. He calls us to imitate Him and pour ourselves out for God Our Father.

Whenever we encounter suffering of any kind, we always have a choice how we will react. We can complain and try to escape our cross, or we can bear it out of love for God. We can ask to be delivered from our crosses—in the Garden Jesus prayed “Father, if it be possible, let this cup of suffering pass Me by.” Our Lord went on to add “Not My will, Father, but Thine be done.”

Whenever we have prayed to be delivered and the cross has not been lifted from us, we ought to offer that cross in union with Christ. Jesus did not shoulder His Cross begrudgingly: He willingly took up His Cross to save you and me. When we cannot escape the cross, let us not merely complain about it but rather remember to offer those sufferings in union with Christ. When we offer our sufferings as a sacrifice to God it adds weight to our prayers.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus speaks to us about our anxieties and worries. They distract us. They're harmful to us if we let them control our lives, because they take our eyes off of our Lord and focus us on what's going wrong and how it might get worse.

Mary chose the "better part" because she didn't let anything distract her from being a disciple learning avidly from Jesus. Mary is invited to do the same, to be fearless in the midst of her activities. When we make the time to put aside the busyness of life to sit quietly and learn from Jesus, we discover reasons why our worries aren't really so worrisome. Only as we sit quietly at the feet of Jesus do we find hope that overcomes despair, peace that conquers anxiety, and wisdom that gets us through trials. Even the littlest worry, such as Martha's concern that her kitchen chores wouldn't get done, is a sin when it takes our eyes off of Jesus. Nothing that distracts us from Jesus is ever good for us.

We cannot grow in holiness when we're not watching Jesus and learning from Him how to be holy. We cannot love as He loves nor receive all the love He gives us unless we have a prayer life that includes quiet time alone with Him, drinking up His lessons and His loving embrace.

Anxieties and worries are varying degrees of fear: We're afraid that something bad is going to happen. Even when there's a legitimate reason to worry, fear blocks our view of Jesus, because it turns us away from Him. We need to recognize fear as a warning flag telling us to slow down, quiet down, and sit down with Jesus for a good discussion on whatever it is that's bothering us.

He's got the answers, the encouragement, and the affirmation that will bring us peace. What has been worrying you lately? What are you anxious about? What are you fearing might happen? Take them to Jesus in a quiet prayer time. Think about them while you are in the busy-ness of your daily living.

What lessons is Jesus trying to teach you in those situations? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you learn from Jesus. Search the Bible for additional inspiration. Share hospitality with others. It's amazing what can happen when you share a meal with a friend – the insights, the discoveries. What are some of the ways we can slow down our lives and improve our prayer times?

Then, after all this, we can say indeed: "Don't worry, be fearless." AMEN!

[Readings: Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-3]

Hearing the familiar story of Abraham “bartering” with God reminds me of those pawn shop reality series now flooding cable TV. A customer comes in with what he or she determines is an item of value. The pawn shop owner gives his assessment of the item, calling in an expert to make sure his instincts are correct. Then they haggle over the price. “I positively absolutely cannot give you more than this.” “I absolutely, positively cannot take less than that.” Usually, the pawn shop owner lowers his offer, and the owner of the item of value takes it.

The importance of today’s reading isn’t about the haggling. Although it seems there wasn’t even five righteous people there. It’s about justice. Should just people die in a fiery blaze because of the sins of others? And what WAS that sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? Sodom and Gomorrah were cities of notorious sin. They did not offer hospitality to the stranger. They abused their sexuality, and, at the same time, they worshiped other gods. They did not trust fully in God’s power. God seeks to destroy this nation and unleash the divine justice they so rightly deserve. One Scripture scholar suggests that the real sin here is people pointing out the sins of others and overlooking their own. Look at Abraham himself. He was the first Jewish patriarch, venerated by the three major world religions – Jewish, Christian and Muslim. But he had multiple wives, committed adultery and often lied to cover his tracks. Perhaps this First Reading should make us aware that each one of us comes before God as a sinner. While God would have every right to condemn us with His divine justice, God offers mercy to the repentant. This reading invites us to focus on our own sin, on our own developing sense of compassion, and the offer of mercy by God to all the waiting world.

In a conversation with God, Abraham explores the range of God’s mercy. When have you been surprised by the extent that God extends mercy to you, choosing to forgive you and welcoming you back to the fold?

Jesus not only shows us how to pray, He encourages persistence. Can you think of a time when your own persistence in prayer has yielded benefits? What keeps you from being persistent in asking for what you truly need?

A young man on a retreat once told this story of prayer: "I was so angry at God because I had asked and asked him to help me stop doing drugs. And then before long I was getting high again.

"I was angry at God and I was angry at my parents who told me that God would help me if I asked. And I was angry at my Catholic school teachers who taught me the same thing. I was especially angry one Sunday when I went back to church after a long time and the preacher said that we should be persistent in prayer and not give up. But I wanted to give up. I could no longer trust God after being seemingly turned down, or worse, ignored, so many times before. And yet a few days later, after another terrible night acting in ways that left me shamed and empty and aching, I got down on my knees one more time. I uttered just two words: 'God, help!' He continued:

"And I felt something. It was an inner click of willingness. Something inside shifted, and trust was born inside me. It only took that moment, and my recovery began. And now I'm glad for every prayer I said along the way. It took all that praying not to change God, but to change me."

This doesn't mean that every trouble or sorrow will be erased by God. After all, the One Who taught us the Our Father knew the fullness of suffering on the cross. He took upon Himself everything that men and women could throw at Him. And yet, He trusted amid this sorrow that the Father would act. The Father would act because God never forgets the righteous!

All of us run the risk of being frozen in our present lives by our past sinful actions. Even when we get the chance to start over, the memory of those actions and the personality they expose stop us in our tracks. And we become dead again.

I heard a homily years ago about the expression "forgive and forget." We have heard and maybe said that expression before, right? "Forgive and forget." I remember a priest saying one time that if we do not forget, we have not truly

forgiven. I do not agree with that opinion. Now that I am on medication and am reaching that age when forgetting is becoming quite regular, here is what I believe is the true difference between the two.

Forgetting is the cessation of memory, the stopping of remembering. But it may also mean the cessation or the stopping of affection. The offense has been so great, my heart becomes cold and stony toward you or toward myself.

Forgiving is the healing of memories. They are still there, but they will no longer have power or control over me. Forgiving can renew affection. The relationship may be different from this point on, but I permit myself to feel for you or for myself once again. Finally, forgiving keeps something in mind that I need to remember but to keep it in its proper place.

So it is possible to forgive and remember, but also possible to move on.

Luke's Gospel has a different wording of the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, than Matthew has in his version. Matthew's version says, "Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us." Luke says – did you notice it here? – "forgive us our sins FOR WE OURSELVES forgive everyone in debt to us." Jesus teaches us in both versions that there is a connection between the way we forgive ourselves and others and the way God forgives us.

Luke seems to believe that God first forgives us; then, because of God's generosity, we're prompted to forgive ourselves and others. The difference here it seems is that God, who cannot be outdone in mercy, can forgive even if we do not. It might be good for us to ask what prompts God to be so generous to us. There can be only one answer: God must value each of us very highly. At the funeral of baseball great Stan Musial, one of his grandsons said, "My grandfather always made nobodies feel like somebodies." God does the same to us. Let us do the same for ourselves and for each other. AMEN!