

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
26 August 2018

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b
Psalm 34
Ephesians 5:21-32
(John 6:63c, 68c) John 6:60-69

We Will Serve the Lord

Earlier this summer I celebrated my first anniversary of being ordained a priest and arriving here at Holy Family to serve as your parochial vicar. And so, these summer months have been a fitting time for me to reflect on my first year of priesthood, as well as look forward to my second year here at Holy Family.

One of the things that has been helpful in my reflection and discernment is to recall Archbishop Sartain's words to me and my classmates in his homily at our Ordination Mass at the Cathedral last year. Archbishop said: "Remember that your vocation...is...the path that God has chosen for your salvation; your path to Heaven. On this path...you will discover more and more who you are. ... [And] Through...ministry [and service] God will teach you who you are to Him."¹ *Through ministry and service* God teaches us. *Through ministry and service* God leads us on our path to Heaven.

With Archbishop's words in mind, I can reflect on how I'm doing in responding to God's call for me to love and serve in this vocation.² That is, am I making progress on my path to Heaven? What new things does God want to teach me about myself and who I am to Him? In what ways is God calling me to recommit myself to this ministry, to recommit myself to loving and serving in the coming year?

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Anniversaries, birthdays, times of transition, moving to a new place, career changes, a new school year: these are all milestones that each of us experience in our lives. Milestones and

opportunities to reflect on our own vocation – our own path to Heaven. To reflect on where we've been and how God has been loving us and supporting us to the present moment. To discern what new things God wants to teach us about ourselves. To recommit to loving and serving in our own vocations, with our own personal gifts.

As we heard proclaimed in the First Reading, the Israelites were at such a moment on their own path to Heaven. The final chapter in the Book of Joshua, in the last moments of his life, Joshua helped the Israelites reflect on all the things God had done for them and their ancestors: from the call of Abraham; to freeing them from slavery in Egypt; to guiding them through the desert; and, finally, leading them to the Promised Land.³ And after reflecting on all that God had done for them, then Joshua and all the Israelites could *recommit* themselves to serving the Lord; *recommit* themselves to the path to Heaven.⁴

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Reflecting on where we've been is such an important part of recommitting ourselves to the path to Heaven. There were times when I struggled in discerning my vocation of priesthood, and in seminary my formation director would often say to me: "This why God gave you a memory."⁵ To *remember* what you've already learned; to *remember* what God has already taught you and brought you through. So that you don't have to keep repeating and going over the same things. To help you move forward on your path to Heaven.

When I was struggling with something, he would say: "Chad, have you already been here before? Has God already taught you something about this?" Remembering is so important – but it can be difficult because, well, we tend to forget things, don't we?

Three weeks ago I preached about how I was inspired by the witness of one of my heroes, Fr. Walter Cizek. Recall that he spent twenty-three years in Soviet prisons and labor camps

before his release back to the United States in 1963. Through his imprisonment and persecution, he grew more and more *confident* in God's Providence helping him through every situation. Yet there were still times when even he would forget, and he would have to be reminded.

Fr. Ciszek learned that when we forget what God has taught us, we can start to question and lose commitment to the things that we had once enthusiastically and joyfully committed ourselves to: whether that be priesthood or marriage; religious life; parenthood; a career or a ministry. What is needed, Fr. Ciszek said, is to remember God's Providence that brought you to this point, followed by "a constant...renewal of" one's commitment.⁶

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A brief example from my own life. Before I was a priest, I served as a volunteer chaplain once a week at Children's Hospital; a ministry that I enjoyed and was very committed to. There were many times that I left work Downtown thinking, "I'm tired; I don't feel like going to the hospital tonight." And when I heard that voice, while it was true that I was tired, I knew that it wasn't the voice of God speaking to me. And I reminded myself that God wanted to teach me something important and special that night in the hospital.

And then, in the hospital, some nights it would be about fifteen minutes left in my volunteer shift, and I would think, it's close enough to the end, let's head home. Regrettably, sometimes I did cut it short. Thankfully, sometimes I listened to a different voice that said, "I have something special to teach you, if you make just one more visit." When I made the choice to serve with one more visit, God was able to teach me the reason that He had sent me to the hospital that night.

My point, brothers and sisters, is that when we choose to serve the Lord, *we're making the right choice*. When we choose to serve the Lord, *God is teaching us who we are*. When we choose to serve the Lord, *we're on the path to Heaven*.

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I began by sharing with you how I've been reflecting on my first year of priesthood. The horrible news about scandals in the Church have certainly affected my reflection and discernment; I know it has affected all of us. It's difficult to reflect, discern, and recommit amidst feelings of confusion, anger, and distrust.

Today, the Lord teaches us through the words of Saint Peter: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."⁷ Therefore, let us turn back to the Lord in prayer, asking Him to help us remember how He has always been with us; asking Him to help us recommit to serving Him.

And the Lord also teaches us through the words of our Archbishop Peter: *Through ministry and service* God teaches us. *Through ministry and service* God leads us on our path to Heaven.

I have found it helpful to respond to this evil by doing an act of good. I encourage you to do the same. Today – every day, if you can – do an act of love and service in your own vocation. Do an act of love and service for your spouse, your children, your parents, your brothers and sisters, your neighbors.

Furthermore, the bulletin is full of opportunities for loving and serving: sponsoring a student from our sister parish in Malawi; teaching parish children in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; inviting someone to come to RCIA or Alpha; the Blood Drive for Sweet Jane;

donating goods to the St Vincent de Paul pantry; making meals and volunteering at our New Bethlehem Day Center.

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My brothers and sisters: doing acts of love and service. This is the best way for us to learn who God made us to be. This is the best way for us to recommit to our path to Heaven.

¹ Archbishop J. Peter Sartain, Homily at Mass for Ordination to the Priesthood, St. James Cathedral, Seattle, Wash., 3 June 2017.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 358: “God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him...”

³ Joshua 24:3-13

⁴ Joshua 24:15, 18

⁵ Fr. Daniel Greenleaf, Theological College Seminary, Washington, D.C.

⁶ Fr. Walter Ciszek, *He Leadeth Me*, 175

⁷ John 6:68