

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
16 September 2018

Isaiah 50:5-9a
Psalm 116
James 2:14-18
(Galatians 6:14) Mark 8:27-35

Our Good Works Keep Our Faith Alive

Three Sundays ago, I shared with you the words that Archbishop Sartain preached to me and my classmates at our Ordination Mass at the Cathedral last year. Archbishop said to us: “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.

Archbishop’s words weren’t meant only for the four of us being ordained priests that Saturday morning. They were meant to inspire all the hundreds of people present at the Cathedral that day. They were words meant to inspire all disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere, including all of us here at Holy Family. Within our particular vocation and state and life, there are acts of ministry and service God calls each of us to do; that He uses to teach us who we are and lead us on our path to Heaven.

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Our Second Reading this morning, from Saint James, teaches us that the ministry and service God calls each of us to do – our good works – are not only something He uses to inspire us and help us grow in faith.² Our good works are not optional parts of our lives. They are not nice extras, like whipped cream and a cherry on top of a sundae. Rather, the good works God calls us to are an *essential* part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Not only do our good works

help other people. Our good works help *us*. Without good works, our faith will wither and die. Our good works keep our faith alive.³

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One of the most important places that God has called me to do ministry and service has been in hospitals. I first began hospital ministry almost ten years ago while I was in seminary. I was enrolled in hospital chaplain training for a year at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC. Going in, I was very intimidated and was not looking forward to it. *How was I going to be able to go into the rooms of total strangers and do anything helpful?* Learning how to be a chaplain became some of the hardest – and the best – experiences of my life. Mostly because I quickly learned that, as a chaplain, I wasn't going into those rooms alone. The Holy Spirit was with me and with the patients and their families during our times together.

At the end of that seminary year, I was struggling a lot with discerning priesthood, so I decided to withdraw from seminary. I moved back to Seattle, and I didn't think that I was ever going to go back. A few months later, a friend of mine from DC called and asked me if I would visit her nephew who was at Seattle Children's Hospital. I agreed, but some of those old thoughts were coming back to me. *How am I going to be able to go into the room of a total stranger and do anything helpful?*

But I went, and immediately I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as I had at the hospital in DC. I knew that God was calling me to this ministry. And, as I exited the hospital that day, I happened to pass by the Hospital Chaplain's Office. So, I knocked on the door, told her who I was, asked her if I could help as a volunteer chaplain, and, in that moment, the trajectory of my life changed.

Even though I was no longer in seminary at that time, through ministry and service, the Lord began to teach me again who I am to Him, and who He was calling me to be. Through ministry and service, the Lord continued to lead me on the path to Heaven, which, for me, is as a priest.

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Now that I am a priest, the Lord continues to teach me and lead me through ministry and service – not only my own ministry and service, but also through others'. We have several parishioners who go to the hospital each week to visit patients and bring them the Eucharist. Just a few days ago, one of our parishioners called me and asked me to come to the hospital and offer Anointing of the Sick to a woman she had just visited. I arrived a couple hours later and prayed with the woman and her daughter.

At the end of the visit, the woman and her daughter were so happy and peaceful and, really, so complimentary. Not of me, but of our parishioner who had come to visit them earlier that day. Then, the woman said to her daughter, "Go ahead, tell Father Chad what happened."

Then her daughter said to me, "I'm not religious at all, but I have to say that your minister was just so wonderful! When she came into the room, we didn't know who she was or why she was here. And at that time, mom's heart rate was out of control at 170. The nurses had been working on her, trying to get her heart under control. But the moment the minister came into the room, without her saying a word, without us knowing who she was, mom's heart rate suddenly slowed down and became normal and calm again."

This little encounter demonstrated for this woman, for her non-religious daughter, for the nurses, and for me, the power of good works. Our parishioner went to the hospital, not on her own power, but with the power that comes from good works inspired by faith – the Power of the

Holy Spirit. Good works not only keep our parishioner's faith alive through her ministry, they also bring life to those she meets.

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Which brings us finally to our Gospel. Jesus asked Saint Peter that important memorable question: "...who do *you* say that I am?"⁴ That question that has remained critical for every disciple of Jesus for the past two thousand years, including us today. Who do *we* say that Jesus is?

Jesus did not ask Peter – does not ask us – that question for His own benefit. He knows who He is. He doesn't need our acknowledgment. He's not fishing for praise or attention. He asked Peter that question for Peter's benefit; to help Peter. And he continues to ask each of us that question for our own benefit; to help us. To help us on our path to Heaven.

The best way for us to answer that question is not with words, but with actions. Through ministry and service – through our good works – Jesus teaches us who He is. He helps us answer that question, not only with words, but with our very lives. And when our lives speak to who Jesus is and who Jesus is calling us to be, then we are on the path to Heaven and we are helping others on that path, as well.⁵

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Who do *you* say that Jesus is? Who is Jesus calling you to be? What ministry or service – what good works – is Jesus calling you to do to help you grow in faith *and* help you answer His question?

Today – every day – you can do good works in your own vocation. Good works for your spouse, your children, your parents, your brothers and sisters, your neighbors. Smile and say hello to people. Help out with chores around the house. Make friends with a new student at

school. Share your games and toys with your brothers and sisters. Make a meal for New Bethlehem Day Center. Donate items to the St. Vincent de Paul Pantry. Make a donation today to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, to help people suffering from poverty.

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Jesus asks each of us that important question, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Our best answer – our most honest answer – comes, not from what we think or feel or say about who Jesus is. Our best and most honest answer comes from our actions. From our good works – when we put our faith into action.⁶

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

² James 2:14-18

³ James 2:17

⁴ Mark 8:29

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1814-1816:

“...the believer seeks to know and do God’s will.”

“Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation...”

⁶ See James 2:18