12th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Spirituality of Ordinary Time”
Fr. Frank Schuster

This time of year always catches me off guard. We observed Lent, we celebrated the Easter Season, we celebrated the Holy Trinity two weeks ago and Corpus Christi last Sunday…and now as Church we celebrate….wait for it…drum roll please…the 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time! The way the Church calendar works, the feast day of the Baptism of the Lord is also the first Sunday of Ordinary Time. We continue with Ordinary Time until Lent begins which of course is determined by when Easter falls (always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox). Once the Easter Season wraps us with Pentecost, we have two more Sundays that have a special focus…then slam, back to Ordinary Time, which isn’t meant to be understood as mundane time. The word ordinary actually is used to mean counted time, as in ordinal numbers, you get the picture.

And what spiritual lessons are we given as we are thrown back in the Ordinary Time? We are given the prophet Jeremiah who was a persecuted prophet of Israel, living in tumultuous times. He is rightly aware of the danger he was in, that there was terror waiting for him on every side. Even though he knows that he will likely be killed for being a prophet of God, he nevertheless has the courage to say, “The Lord is with me like a mighty champion…Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord!” That is what his faith was made of most of the time. I say “most of the time” because Jeremiah was also a very complicated person, very human when you get to know him. This makes him very approachable in my opinion. Jesus challenges his disciples to have the same courage that Jeremiah articulates today when he tells them in our Gospel reading from Matthew, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” These are challenging words but nevertheless good advice!

As we find ourselves back into Ordinary Time, we are given two spiritual lessons that I think are very helpful reminders in the spirit life. The first reminder is that having God in our lives does not prevent hardships, or getting the common cold, a medical problem or acne. Jeremiah still praises God while enduring every kind of hardship. Jesus is telling his disciples to not be afraid of the mobs that wanted to kill them but rather to keep their loyalty to God who alone is the author of life. The mark of a disciple of Jesus is someone who praises God regardless if it is sunny or raining, whether we are comfortable or in pain, whether we are healthy or sick, a disciple of Jesus praises God in good times and in bad. This is a good spiritual reminder.

The second spiritual lesson as we march back into Ordinary Time is to reevaluate our priorities, what is most important in life. Jesus says do not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul. I read this as meaning the mark of a disciple of Jesus is someone who understands that everything on this planet,
including our bodies, will one day turn to dust. This means the most important priorities we should be pursuing is a relationship with God and the spiritual wellbeing of the people around us. There is nothing more important than that. What does this look like?

I could easily talk about a number of saints starting with Mother Teresa or Pope John Paul II; however, since I am the director of the deacon formation program I thought I’d share a story about the patron saint of deacons, Saint Lawrence. St. Lawrence is a martyr of the early Church whose faith in Jesus helped win converts to Christianity during a time when it was illegal to be a Christian. Legend has it that when Pope Sixtus II was sentenced to be martyred, Deacon Lawrence wanted to die with him. The Pope however told Lawrence that although it wasn’t Lawrence’s time yet to be martyred, that time would be coming soon…in three days. Meanwhile, the prefect of Rome called Lawrence to appear before him. The prefect believed that Christians were stealing the treasure of Rome and hoarding it. The prefect demanded that Lawrence hand over the treasure of the Church. Lawrence said that he would do so provided he was given three days and the prefect agreed. Lawrence went throughout the city and alleyways and gathered the poor, the blind, and the sick and, three days later, brought them to the prefect and said, “I present to you the treasure of the Church.” This didn’t go over well with the prefect and so he ordered Lawrence bound to a grate and roasted over a fire. Legend has it, Saint Lawrence told his executioners at one point, “I think I am done on this side. You can turn me over”. How is that for faith!

Jesus says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul”. And as heroic the story of Saint Lawrence’s martyrdom is for us to contemplate, this kind of persecution is going on even today in many parts of the world as we all know. Their witness I think calls each and every one of us to ask the question, “What is my faith made of”? “What do I believe in really?” “Am I a believer in good times and in bad or am I lukewarm?” These are good questions to ask ourselves as we make the jump back to Ordinary Time and a good examination of conscience this time of year. This is because Ordinary Time is not mundane time, it is counted time. And as disciples of Jesus we rejoice rather than despair, that like Ordinary Time, our days here are numbered. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Count that!