

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Spiritual Lessons from Ordinary Time”  
Fr. Frank Schuster

This is our last weekend outside. Next week we will be able to worship again inside our church. I can't wait. You see, the celebration of Mass these past several months have been really strange for all of us. The lockdown began during the season of Lent. Even our Holy Week liturgies were limited to seven assistants at any given service. The entire Easter Season was a virtual celebration. Thank goodness for technology. I don't know how the good people in 1918 coped in their day. However, it will be so very good to be inside again.

And as strange as this year has been, even back in the good old days this time of the liturgical year always has a way of catching 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...Ordinary Time! The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time to be exact. You see, the way the Church calendar works, the feast day of the Baptism of the Lord back in January was also the first Sunday of Ordinary Time. We continued with Ordinary Time until Lent began which of course is determined by when Easter falls. Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox and so you count backwards from that to mark the beginning of Lent. Once the Easter Season wrapped up with Pentecost this year, we had two more Sundays that had a special focus, Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi. And then slam, back to Ordinary Time. And, to be clear, Ordinary Time isn't meant to be understood as mundane time. I don't think anyone would think of these days we live in as “ordinary” in that sense. The word “ordinary” with regard to this liturgical season actually means 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 here on the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday? 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. 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, if understood correctly, it is also very good advice!

As we find ourselves back into Ordinary Time, we are given two spiritual lessons that I think are very helpful reminders. The first reminder is that having God in our lives does not prevent hardships or prevent us from getting sick or prevent us from getting 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. That 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 to us 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 own bodies, will one day turn to dust. This means the most important priority we should be pursuing is a relationship with God, which includes caring about the spiritual wellbeing of the people around us. There is nothing more important than that.

And so, my friends, it is good every so often to ask the questions, “What is my faith made of?” “What do I believe in really?” and “What is the most important thing in life right now?” These are good questions to ask ourselves as we make the jump back to Ordinary Time. It is also a good examination of conscience this time of year and the times we live in. This is because Ordinary Time is not mundane time, it is counted time. Our days are numbered like the hairs on our head. As disciples of Jesus we rejoice in that knowledge rather than despair. This is because our relationship with Jesus makes us ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, a world without end. Because of our configuration to Jesus, we have been given the power to transcend the times we live in as messengers of hope.