

February 7, 2020

Epiphany 5

Leader: The parishes of the Diocese of Ottawa sit on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

All: May we live together in unity and peace.

Opening Prayer

Leader: When troubles come, I never have to face them alone. Thank you Lord for always being with me as my refuge and my strength. Friends can fail, families can split apart, my whole world can be shaken to its foundations, leaving me dazed and disoriented, but You never change. Your truths are forever. You do not shrug off my concerns and move on – You are my very present help in trouble, standing firmly at my side whatever happens, guiding my actions and giving me strength to carry on. When all else fails, when family and friends desert me, I put my trust in You and am never disappointed. Thank you, Lord. Samen
(*Fear Not* from Light Upon My Path)

Reflection for This Week

Faces and words and glimpses of souls...

One by one we come.

We are many and then one.

Precious faces, tender words,
sweet glimpses into souls...

Just being here among you is a joy!

Unending thank yous rise within me
for these beloved ones within your Church, O God.

Blessed be their lives! Blessed be your Church!

(*My Church Family* from Searching for Shalom by Ann Weems)

Celebrant Almighty God,

All to you all hearts are open,

all desires known,

and from you no secrets are hidden.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts

by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,

that we may perfectly love you,

and worthily magnify your holy name;

through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Celebrant Glory to God in the highest,
All and peace to his people on earth.
**Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father,
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your Glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
You are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
In the glory of God the Father. Amen**

The Proclamation of the Word

The first Reading is from the book of Isaiah,
Chapter 40, Verses 21 to 31

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 147

Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!
how pleasant it is to honour him with praise!

The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.

He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.

**He counts the number of the stars
and calls them all by their names.**

Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
there is no limit to his wisdom.

**The Lord lifts up the lowly,
but casts the wicked to the ground.**

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make music to our God upon the harp.

**He covers the heavens with clouds
and prepares rain for the earth;**

He makes grass to grow upon the mountains
and green plants to serve mankind.

**He provides food for flocks and herds
and for the young ravens when they cry.**

He is not impressed by the might of a horse,
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

**He declares his word to Jacob,
His statutes and his judgements to Israel.**

The second Reading is from **the First letter of Paul to the Corinthians,**
Chapter 9, Verses 16 to 23

For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The Gospel

Reader The Lord be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Reader The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
according to the Blessed St. Mark.

People **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

St. Mark Chapter 1, Verses 29 to 39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

At the conclusion of the Gospel, the reader says,

The Gospel of Christ.

*People **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.***

The Homily

“Long Before Dawn”

When I was a seminarian, I discovered that I really enjoyed Biblical studies and found that I was fairly good at it! Because of one course I took at Carleton on the comparative reading of the first three gospels, a thing called Synoptic Studies, I became fascinated by the themes and approaches taken by Matthew, Mark and Luke and how similar they were and how yet dissimilar they were! Heady stuff back in those days and I continue to be surprised when I read the texts – more often than not, I find myself engaged with what I call the “gotchas of God” - in which the good Lord will show me something I hadn’t seen or thought about before in a passage and then God would say in a gleeful kinda way, “GOTCHA!”

Early in my career as an amateur Biblical scholar, I discovered something about how Mark moulded his narrative which has fascinated me for the last fifty years! If you read this particular gospel, you might see a pattern of movement on the part of Jesus. The gospel for this morning is a classic example of what I’m talking about. It opens with these words, “Long before dawn, while it was still dark, Jesus left the house and found a lonely place to pray.”

As you read through Mark’s gospel, you will see that this action is repeated over and over again. What Jesus does is move in the world – healing and teaching - and then retreats for a while and while in this solitude converses with his father. He then returns and re-engages the world until he retreats once again having been physically and exhausted by his labour for his father. Over and over this pattern is played out, beginning with the moment after his baptism until his time in Gethsemane the night before his execution. Engage – retreat – converse - re-enter...

Mark makes it clear that, at least the first time this happens, Jesus is not a totally willing participant. In his narrative, Mark uses the Greek word for “throws” - he states, as we have for some reason translated it, “At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert” which sounds sorta

sweet and lovey-dovey doesn't it, Jesus and the Spirit hand in hand skipping into the wilds; but it is anything but that! There, in the wasteland of the Jordan wilderness into which he has been mercilessly thrown, Jesus comes face to face with all the demons that haunt him. Mark says that, as he went through this time of testing and trial, "he was with the wild animals and angels ministered to him." When Jesus went into that quiet and lonely place, he entered into a special relationship with God which had been poured over him at his baptism when the voice said, "You are my Son, my Beloved One in whom I am well pleased." There, in the silence and solitude, Jesus fulfilled the words of Psalm 27, "Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart; wait for the Lord" and Psalm 37, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him". In that close encounter with the Divine, Jesus is given, as William Barclay the English Biblical commentator wrote, "his marching orders" and was then given all that he needed from God's toolbox to be faithful in his mission and ministry.

While alone with God, Jesus had the opportunity to listen to the Lord and at the same time challenge the tasks that were being laid before him. Witness this moment in the garden near Bethany as interpreted by Tim Rice in *JC Superstar*: Jesus says to his father, "I only want to say, if there is a way, take this cup away from me for I don't want to taste it's poison..." and ends his prayer conversation, "God, thy will is hard, but you hold every card. I will drink your cup of poison..."

In our own lives, there are moments in which we are all thrown into the wilderness place. Life is complex and often almost impossible to understand and cope with. We are thrown into places where we are encountered by our own demons and find in that quiet and lonely place which sometimes is more chaotic and filled with dark creatures than one can imagine, a chance to truly engage with God, not necessarily with old prayers and things we've memorized, but with what Mattie Stepanek called Heartsongs.

When I was diagnosed with my first go-round of cancer, I went into a dark and frightening place – this was all so off my radar, so unexpected and, I felt, so uncalled for. I hadn't been retired all that long and things seemed so so unfair. I remember saying to Sharon that I didn't deserve this thing that was growing in me and her answer hit like a ton of bricks, "If not you, who else would you want to have it?" That woke me up but did little to ease the anger I felt – anger at the cancer, and really angry at and with God. I ranted and raved against him, like a very serious Rick Mercer moment, and came to the conclusion that there was no God in that desert place, that he had turned his back on me. I remembered the words of Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon, we lay down and wept, when we remembered thee O Zion" and I could not answer the question asked by the Psalmist, "My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, *Where is your God?*" While putting on a brave public face, within there was a storm blowing like the ones that unexpectedly sweep across the lake at the cottage. I began to think that all I had done in my life both as a layperson and as a priest was for naught and that God was retreating from me every day and leaving me in such pain and ... I

was there in that dark place for a number of years, although few would know it because I had this warrior face I put on as much for myself as for others. Over the years, the quiet place has become more peace-filled and I am beginning to hear once again the Voice which says to me, “You are a child of mine and I am well pleased with you...I love you.” I can’t claim that I hear God as some sort of thundering Voice; what I have come to see is the presence of God in the people who populate my world – the physicians and oncologists who have been gifted with the knowledge and skill to deal with my cancers, my wife and children who have steadfastly watched over me through my recovery, the friends who have kept me in their personal and parish prayer loops, Kahla my tolerant dog who sees our daily walks as therapy for her aging master, my faith communities who support me through good and bad times – all these and so many more signs that God is present. It reminds me of the story of how Abraham fed strangers and then discovered that they were truly angels. God is present to me each and every day and every once in a while I hear him say still through all these persons, “Gotcha!” I am still at odds with the Lord over the cancer thing but at least now the whirling dervishes that haunted me are less whirly and I am rediscovering the things that I had forgotten that truly matter to me – my family, my friends, my gifts and the opportunities I am given to exercise and share them, my sense of worth which has grown a lot in the last couple of years, a return - even if sometimes shakily - of my faith, and that it is possible to love the Lord while not always agreeing with Him.

In this pandemic time, many of us find ourselves where we do not want to be. We feel isolated and abandoned, alone and are fear-filled at times. The communities of relationships we once had are, if not dormant, at least in a state of flux and change which can be very upsetting and confusing. We look for light in the darkness, for hope in the midst of the despair, love in a season of loneliness. We look for God in this midst of all this and we discover that our Lord has not run away from us – rather, he waits for us to turn and see his arms outstretched, his face saturated with light and joy in the faces, hands and hearts of friends and strangers who cross our path. God call us to leave all the confusion and terrors of this time and become like His Son, who, “long before dawn before it was yet light, left home and found a quiet and lonely place” and there commune with the Creator of life and love.

Amen.

The Apostles’ Creed

Celebrant Let us confess the faith of our baptism, *as we say*,

All I believe in God,

the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

**He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again
to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of the People

(Let us give thanks to God our Father, always and for everything, saying, “We thank you, Lord.”)

For the beauty and wonder of creation,
We thank you, Lord.

For all that is gracious in the lives of men and women, revealing the image of Christ,
We thank you, Lord.

For our daily food, for our homes and families and friends,
We thank you, Lord.

For minds to think and hearts to love,
We thank you, Lord.

For health, strength, and skill to work, and for leisure to rest and play,
We thank you, Lord.

For those who are brave and courageous, patient in suffering and faithful in adversity,
We thank you, Lord.

For all who pursue peace, justice, and truth,

We thank you, Lord.

For all the saints whose lives have reflected the light of Christ,

We thank you, Lord.

We ask you to watch over all our parish family, remembering especially Zachariah, Marjorie, Cheryl, Jeanette, Roy, Emerson, and those known to You alone. May we, by example, draw others towards the glorious Light of the World.

In the Worldwide Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the Anglican Church of Burundi.

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for Area Parish of the St. Lawrence and their clergy, The Venerable Peter Crosby and Deacon Richard Matthias.

We pray for all Regional Deans in our diocese.

In our Companion Diocese of Jerusalem and The Middle East, we pray for Christ Church, Nazareth, Israel.

Confession and Absolution

Celebrant: Dear friends in Christ, God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy; he welcomes sinners and invites them to his table. *Let us confess our sins, confident in God's forgiveness.*

Most merciful God,

we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us, that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.

Celebrant: Almighty God have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

The Collect of the New Day

Merciful Lord,

grant to your faithful people pardon and peace,

that we may be cleansed from all our sins

and serve you with a quiet mind;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

**who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.**

Additional Prayers

All: Almighty God and Father of us all, have mercy upon this troubled world of ours. We are a pilgrim people, made of clay, captives of our own greed and frailty. And yet, we are the work of your hands. You have made us in your own image and we bear within us your Spirit of life, the seeds of immortality. Give us, we pray, a stronger faith so that we may walk joyously into the unknown, an unshakeable hope so that we may comfort the despairing, and a love as vast as all the oceans, so that we may hold all humankind in our hearts. All powerful God, look in your love upon us your pilgrim people as we struggle towards you. Be our food for the journey, our wine for rejoicing and our welcome at the journey's end. Amen

(Sheila Cassidy from The Flowering of the Soul)

All: O God who is in heaven, our hope and trust are fully in you. May you guide us on this long road we have not travelled before. It is often during our lives that you have helped us. Well we know your holy help, because we were often held by sorrow, with no escape. When the need was highest, it was then that you would lay your merciful eye upon us, and a light like the shining of the sun would come on our worried minds. The clouds of sorrow would be gone without a trace; in its place there would be a spiritual joy we cannot describe. For this, we thank you Lord. Amen

Celebrant Glory to God,
All whose power, working in us,
can do infinitely more
than we can ask or imagine.
Glory to God from generation to generation,
in the Church and in Christ Jesus,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Dismissal and Blessing

Leader:

May peace be within us, peace be around us; peace be beside us, peace be between us. May we walk peacefully with Mother Earth and may peace fill our days and our nights; may peace fill the earth. Amen.

Amen

Announcements

Ash Wednesday: Our Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17. Because of COVID, we are not able to gather as community to “keep a holy Lent” so I am proposing the following: on Tuesday February 16th, I will place small bags of blessed ashes at the front door of Holy Trinity and I invite any who wish ashes to come and take a bag. That evening I will zoom a shortened service for Ash Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. during which you can sign yourself with the sign of the cross in ashes – there is no “rule” that says this act of honouring the beginning of Lent has to be done by an ordained person. I will have the ashes at the church by 1:00 p.m. on Shrove Tuesday (February 16th)

Annual Vestry: Our Parish Zoom Vestry will be held on February 21 following our church service – I anticipate the Vestry will begin by 11:30 a.m. (depending upon how long the clergyman preaches!)