

July 10, 2016, 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The other day I was visiting a young person in an intensive care ward of a hospital. The parents were there. And they told me that the doctor for the child, who was in intensive care, the pediatric doctor, had stayed in the hospital 48 hours straight in order to help to coordinate care for their child during a very tricky time where they were trying to stabilize the young person.

48 hours.

You'll never hear about that on the news....but some doctor did that.

And someone pointed out to me that not only did this doctor stay two days at the hospital, making a big sacrifice, but that there was someone at home, a husband probably with kids....who made sacrifices too....handling a lot of extra things because of this.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is with some people from within the Jewish community who studied the Scriptures, the Bible and also the laws of the Jewish religion.

And one of them, a man who studied the Scriptures and the teachings of the Jewish faith so much that he was called a "scholar of law" in the reading, asks Jesus a few questions. One is what are the most important commandments or laws from God....and Jesus says to love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. And then the Scholar of the Law asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor?"

And then Jesus tells this story about the Good Samaritan. Just for the fun of it, I'll mention that even by picking a Samaritan, Jesus was making a point: Jewish people and Samaritans did not get along with each other in the time of Jesus....they really didn't get along and didn't associate with each other AT ALL. SO: #1, Jesus is making a point there....The Samaritan is the one who actually HELPS the person who is in trouble, he makes no excuses.

The priest walks by, there were priests in the Jewish religion of the time, they worked in the Temple in Jerusalem...and he avoids this man laying in a ditch.... And then a LEVITE walks by, and Levites, like the priests, worked in the Temple in Jerusalem. And, well, he walks on by too. And for both the priest and the Levite, why they chose to walk on by the man in the ditch was that they may have been because it would have, in the religious practices of the time, made him ritually

unclean to touch a dead man...and maybe he thought the fellow was dead. So, he made an excuse to not help the man in the ditch. In Jesus's time there were things that would make you ritually unclean, and before then, going to synagogue or praying the prayers of the religion, you had to go through certain ceremonies to put you back into being right with the religion.

So, in a way, in Jesus's story, the priest and the Levite used their religion as an excuse to not simply help this guy.

And I am thinking today of the priest and the Levite who DID NOT help this man beaten and in a ditch versus the Good Samaritan and the doctor I learned about last week.

And it occurs to me that all of us can make excuses at times for not doing maybe what God wants us to do.

And it also occurs to me that in this world where we have the shootings of the police officers, and of the people in Orlando, and of the church members in Charleston, and 1,000 other events besides....that can become an excuse for us to not do good if we are not careful: To say "Boy the world is a mess, I give up." Well, Jesus has something to say to you today if you ever let that kind of thinking affect you....I'll get to that in a second.

And it also occurs to me that in this world which sometimes offers us disappointments and challenges, that we can just stop trying so hard to help others. Maybe someone is harsh in judging us and we think "Boy, I sure do work hard, why are those people so mean? Goodness." And we can let experiences like that take the wind out of our sails. But we can't.

Because there are a lot more little girls that are going to be in the ICU that people have to help.

And people are laying in a ditch somewhere right now that people have to help.

And people all over Annapolis and Bowie and Davidsonville have just lost a loved one, or have just been diagnosed with cancer, or they just feel lonely.

And we better be ready to be people who try to bring the love of God into the world and not just nurse our wounds or our frustrations....

So listen to what Jesus has to say to you about that this morning:

It was actually, I have to be honest, written by a man named Anthony Padovano, so I know it's not Jesus.

BUT, I don't think Jesus would mind you listening up to this... Here it is:

The article is called "HOPE IN MINISTRY":

If you believe in the gift of the Spirit of God, you don't fail.

You dance a little, cry a little, sing a new song unto the Lord –

share a word, hug a friend, dream at night, break bread, take new wine,
careful to throw out the old wineskins and you don't fail.

You may have only five loaves and a few fish.

and it seems so little when there is so much to be done.

You may have only have six jars of water

and no one is very happy with you or with that.

You may only have a mustard seed or a manger.

The only way out may be Egypt.

You may only have three years to do it all in.

You might not even have a boat of your own.

You may have only a few stories – no title, no degree,
no Temple to back you up or support you.

You may only have the road to Jerusalem and it goes uneasily through Samaria.

You may only have bread and a cup of wine on the night before it's all over.

You may have only a few friends and they're all asleep.

You may not have the right words to get yourself off the charge --

and so you forgive them for not knowing what else to do with you.

You may not even have a Father in the darkness of Calvary and wish your mother
wasn't there to see you.

You may only have one apostle left at the cross and hardly any disciples.

Sometimes all you've got are your wounds and one last shred of hope.

But if the Spirit of God is in you – you win –

not for your sake alone, but for everyone.

If the Spirit of God is with us, nothing is lost, not even a coin,

certainly not a sheep that wants to be rescued or a minister who seeks to be a
shepherd.

Nothing is lost

not even Peter who denies Christ

or the Pharisee who comes to him only at night.

Nothing is lost.

Once the church had only the Spirit of God, nothing else,

and it proclaimed its message without power or legal sanction in Jerusalem, Athens and Rome.

Astonishingly, it prevailed – with the Spirit of God alone –
this is not rhetoric – it is history.

We have the Spirit of God. Why do we keep thinking we need anything else.

So: This morning, we are called to be like that doctor who stayed at the hospital for a young girl 48 hours. And like the Good Samaritan.

Let's not let our own tough knocks in life, or disappointments or the state of the world take away our hope and our drive to be people who bring the love of God into the world through how we live and the choices we make. Let's not make excuses like the priest and the Levite...and let's not let the craziness of this world make us feel like our small contribution won't make a difference. Because, as the writing by Mr. Padovano said, "IF THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS WITH US, NOTHING IS LOST"...not even a kind hello to a stranger or an encouraging word to a family member.

Let's be people who bring the love of God into our families, friendships, parish, schools and neighborhoods this week. No matter what life has handed us.