

Homily for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 26, 2007

Isaiah 66:18--21

Hebrews 12:5---7, 11--13

Luke 13:22--30

You've heard of the story of the flood waters rising, and the crusty old gentleman sitting on his front porch in his rocking chair, rocking away as the waters are lapping at his feet. A man in a **ROWBOAT** comes by, "Jump in, sir." "No," says the old man, "God will take care of me."

Next day the flood waters have risen to the second floor of his house. A young woman in a **MOTORBOAT** came by. She said, "Hurry up, sir. I'll drive you to safety." The old man says, "I'm putting my trust in God. The Lord will save me."

The third day the man sat on the peak of his roof as the waters surged around him. A **HELICOPTER** hovered over him. The pilot dropped a ROPE LADDER and hollered, "Climb aboard, buddy. There's no time to waste!" The old man, set in his ways, retorted: "I need no help. The Lord will save me".

The fourth day, the man drowned!

He was before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates upset, angry and arguing with St. Peter at the pearly gates; demanding to see God. "God, you promised me that if I had faith, you'd save me; but my faith let me down. Where were you?"

God looked with kindness at the upset man and said, "Sir, I tried to save you three times, but you wouldn't pay any attention. You wouldn't listen to me. You weren't open."

Sometimes prayer IS all we can do. But most often God works through people and circumstances of our lives. The point is that we can't sit back, rest on our laurels, and expect salvation. It's not enough simply to be baptized, or simply to go to church, or to simply have the name Christian or Catholic; we have to do something about it...we have to put the gift of faith into action. Most often God works through other people and through circumstances (like the situation of the flooding and the man who drowned).

In today's Gospel from Luke 13:22-30, there are two theological issues before us today:

1. **Who will be saved?** Yes, salvation is GRACE. It is pure Gift. It cannot be earned or merited. We cannot work our way into heaven. On the other hand, that God-given gift of Grace must be responded to. It must be activated, it must be energized, or else

we may lose that gift. Like the muscle in your body you never use will atrophy. To the question, "Who will be saved?" Jesus says, "Try to enter through the narrow gate". What a great image! The door is wide open for everyone. Everyone is invited. The door is wide enough just for each one of us to get through . . . but maybe not for all our baggage: our possessions, our grudges, our biases, our pettiness, and our sins. Jesus was trying to tell the Jewish people that it was not enough that they simply kept the law, or that they had a great family pedigree--that they were children of Abraham and Sarah (Well, Abraham and Sarah had tremendous faith!) Each person has to accept Jesus as their own; each person has to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. They must personally go through the door, the gate, the person Jesus. Isn't that a great example? In John 10, Jesus talks about "I am the gate, I am the door, I am the shepherd".

They retorted, "But Jesus, Jesus, we are part of your inner circle! We are baptized. We are registered at the church. We partied with you! We went to school together! You know us! Open up for us!"

But Jesus surprisingly said, "I don't know where you come from." It's another way of saying, "I don't know who you are". Being a passing acquaintance with others may be fine, but it is not enough to be a passing acquaintance with Jesus. You see...not only do we need to develop a relationship with Jesus; we need to do something with it.

"Christianity also involves (as the theologian Karl Rahner reminds us) the "divinization" of the world." To make the world and those in it divine/holy...to touch people with God's love. Are people better because of their acquaintance with us? Jesus came not only to get US to heaven, but to get "heaven" into us! Do you realize you have the "divine" in you? Do other people see the divine in you? The challenge is here and now. A salvation that does good is more concerned with getting us into LIFE rather than into Heaven.

2. Another theological point is the theology of the **Universality of Salvation**. It's interesting, isn't it, how Jesus is always challenging His people, his disciples to be more inclusive, not to be so narrow-minded, not to be so myopic in their vision. Dare WE include the enemy, the alien, the immigrant, the handicapped, the prisoner, the black sheep of the family, the divorced person, the unwed mother, the cranky neighbor? Dare WE be more inclusive? And yet we hear Jesus say, "Yes, there WILL BE people in the Kingdom of God that we will be surprised to see (or hear about!). There will be people in the eternal Kingdom from the East, and the West, and the North and the South." Never limit the generosity of God. Never limit the universality of God's care.

TALK ABOUT DIVINE PROVIDENCE; TALK ABOUT GOD'S GENEROSITY!

In the spring of this year, Holy Spirit was approached about the possibility of selling our property to our neighbor, Living Hope, who requested us to keep it strictly confidential.

I appointed a negotiating team of six people who have etched out a Sales and Purchase Contract for \$4.75 million. This past Monday, this contract was presented to the Priests' Council who recommended that our Bishop sign, and he did. Let me make it clear, we have in OUR hand and Living Hope Baptist Church has in their hand, a Sales and Purchase Contract. The closing will be January 31, 2008. In other words, it is NOT a done deal until January 31, 2008, at which time Living Hope puts the \$4.75 million into a financial institution. They get the interest until we move off this land.

We have two and a half years from January 31, 2008, to move out to our new site. The sooner we move, the better it will be for both churches.

The key for us is the upcoming Capital Campaign in the Fall which has already been in the planning and the kick off has already been set for October 28 on the new land. We need \$2.5 million AT LEAST... and any above that amount will only speed up the time table for us. I see us following our present laid out plan to build the Parish Hall, Educational Wing (including a youth room), and parish offices first ...so we can move. Wouldn't it be great if we could start the church building almost immediately and I, personally (and I'm not speaking for the committee), think we can!!!

One sacrifice Holy Spirit will be asked to make will involve the green space between our parking lot and Westen...INCLUDING the soccer field, EXCLUDING the enclosed playground. The green space will be used for Living Hope parking. They will NOT be using our present paved parking—we need that. All of this is being announced this Sunday to both congregations. It will be announced to the public at large on Monday at a Press Conference at 9:00am, to which you are all invited. There will be a **Spirit is Moving Us** Q & A opportunity on Sunday, September 16th at 5:00 pm in our parish hall.

All along...even with a successful capital campaign, our moving forth to Holy Spirit Parkside has always been contingent on the sale of this property. We had no idea when this would be. Quite honestly, I thought it might be several more years down the road...and that would be OK...it would happen on God's time. THIS IS GOD'S TIME! There have been three other interested parties over the past three years, but this is the first serious contender we have had in our property. AND A VERY GENEROUS OFFER HAS BEEN MADE TO US! I think it's a God thing; I think it's the work of the Spirit of God. It wasn't a rowboat or a motorboat or even a helicopter, but a leer jet!!! We are so ahead of where we thought we would be. With the sale of this property, and a generous and sacrificial response to a successful capital campaign, we are on our way!!!

There is a story of two stone cutters. Both were asked, "What are you doing?" The first said, "I am cutting this stone into blocks." The second one replied, "I am on a team building a cathedral!" It will take all of us working together, pulling together, and especially praying together, because what we are doing is bigger than anyone of us. It's bigger than me. It's bigger than all of you. Because what we are doing is building

CHURCH for future generations. Our attitude and our disposition of faith will make a terrific, terrific difference.

Finally, how often in the past have God's people been asked to do things that they didn't fully understand? How often have you been asked to do something you didn't understand? To pick up and move, to change jobs, to go through difficulties, and you didn't quite understand what was happening.

I think of MARY. She was asked to be the Mother of the Messiah; she didn't fully understand, and she must have been fearful. But she had a tremendous relationship with God, and because of her faith in God, she responded with a whole-hearted "Yes!"

I think of ABRAHAM and SARAH, who were very comfortable with where they lived. God asked them to pick up and move to a foreign country—to the land of Ur. They must have had very mixed emotions, but because of their faith, because of their relationship with God, they packed up and followed God's lead. Furthermore, God told them that their descendents would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore. "But how is this going to happen?" they thought, "We're old and we have no children. How is this going to happen?" They were told, "You will have a son!" And they did.

I truly believe God is working with our community; I truly believe this can be viewed as a faith challenge. We started this process many years ago not dreaming where it would lead us...at each juncture along the way, challenges presented themselves, and decisions were made, and sometimes re-visited. A huge part of the road map all along was the sale of this property. (Well, if that doesn't happen, that's OK; we'll go with the flow). Now we have this amazing opportunity! I truly believe God's Spirit is not only **moving** us, but the Spirit of God is **picking us up** and **transporting** us to Holy Spirit Parkside.

I ask your prayers. This is an exciting and challenging time for us. It will not be easy. It will take all of us working together. I ask that you be praying. I ask that we listen to one another, that we respect one another emotions, and that we move forward together.