

4<sup>th</sup> Sun in Ord Time – C  
January 31, 2010 – Holy Angels Church  
Homilist: Rev. Roland M. LaPlante  
Readings: Jer 1:4-5,17-19; 1 Cor 12:31-13:13; Lk 4:21-30

**DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:** I want to talk to you today about the second reading, because it's one of the most sublime in the Bible. But before I do, let me just say a few words about the Gospel

Today's episode continues from last week the scene of Jesus in the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth. In fact, Luke is probably telescoping three different visits of Jesus to his hometown. The first visit, reflected in last week's reading, was the occasion in which Jesus clearly announced that HE was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah about the Messiah: "Today," he said, "this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." What he's saying is, "Here I am." You remember that all had their eyes fixed on him and marveled at the pleasing discourse that came from his lips. It must have been an electrifying event...to hear the announcement for which the Jewish people had waited for thousands of years.

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Today's Gospel reading really reflects a second and third visit. In the second visit, the people are beginning to become skeptical. They were looking for an earthly kingdom and he was announcing a spiritual one. Besides, Jesus wouldn't work any miracles for them...because of their lack of faith in him. So, they started to say: "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" Meaning...what's all the fuss about anyway?"

The third visit seems to involve some act of hostility toward Jesus on the part of the townspeople...it's a rejection of him that we're witnessing, because he won't BE what they WANT him to be, and because of their shock at his suggestion that the Gentiles might be a more receptive audience.

Notice the parallel between Jesus and the career of Jeremiah in the first reading. Jeremiah didn't have a narrow focus to his preaching. The reading says: "I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jesus

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draws the same parallel with Elijah and Elisha. Their preaching to Israel made scarcely a dent, but they were successful with the Gentiles. The lesson seems clear...when we listen to the words of Jesus, let's hear what HE is saying and not what WE want to hear, and then let's accept it.

In the second reading, Jesus speaks to us through his apostle, Paul. The lesson has to do with the necessities of life. There are lots of things we possess that we don't really need. Thoreau once said: "I enjoy going to town and viewing the market place. It makes me happy to see so many things I don't want, things I can do without."

Perhaps we could all profit a bit by that philosophy. We collect a lot of excess baggage as we get older. The things we considered luxuries yesterday we think of as necessities today, and so the list of things we THINK we have to have grows longer and longer.

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In our complex society, with its network of communications, its advertising saturation, and the wealth of its people, the distinction between what is NEEDED and what is OPTIONAL is hopelessly blurred.

St. Paul suggests that there are only three things that abide...that are ALWAYS needed. And they are faith, hope and love...we can't do without these. Wherever you find people, you will find these three, because people simply can't live without them. They are a necessity for life.

The first is FAITH. We're sometimes inclined to think that faith is a religious abstraction...something the prophets invented to write the Scriptures, or that priests dreamed up to build sermons around. But faith is far from being an exclusively religious idea. Faith is fundamental, inescapable. Without it, life is impossible.

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Without faith it's impossible to build a business. Of course, you need skill and determination, and capital and opportunity to build a successful business. But unless you have faith, you're finished before you start...faith in your own ability, faith in the product or service you'll provide, faith in your associates, faith in your customers, faith in the economy and in the currency. No business, great or small, has ever been built without faith.

Without faith it's impossible to get an education. In these days when there's an information explosion, it's not possible for an individual to personally research and check all the data he absorbs. The student must exercise the principle of faith...faith in the school where he studies, faith in his teachers, faith in the authors of the texts he's using..

And of course, we all know that no MARRIAGE could possibly succeed unless both spouses have faith in each other. What the New Testament

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does is to take this indispensable part of life, and apply it at the highest level. It simply says...put your faith in God, too. You exercise faith every day of your life. Now INVEST your faith in the one who above all others is MOST to be trusted.

I like the logic of the man who said, “If you can’t trust God, whom can you trust?” Faith is something you can’t do without.

The second indispensable item is HOPE. An orderly, workable life is impossible without it. In a celebrated passage, St. Paul wrote, “We are SAVED by hope.” This is true in an eternal and heavenly sense, and it’s equally true in an earthly and temporal sense. Who among us is satisfied with our world as it is? We look around us and see problems that need solving, suffering that needs curing, injustice that needs to be righted.

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For that matter, who among us is satisfied with his own life? We're not what we ought to be, and we know it. There are flaws in the fabric and skeletons in the closet. There are unfulfilled promises and betrayals of love. What sustains us and motivates us in the face of these problems without and failures within is hope. Somehow, we're convinced that **HOW WE ARE** doesn't have to be the final edition...that problems can be solved, suffering can be cured, injustice can be righted, failure can be corrected. We are saved by hope.

You don't have to look far to see hope at work. Research scientists keep grappling with deadly diseases...heart disease, cancer, arthritis...no one knows the whole answer. What keeps them working? It's the hope that someday they'll find the answer. Take away that hope, and all laboratories would close. Take away hope from anyone's life and such profound despair would result that suicide becomes a real danger. Hope is imperative. Without it life is impossible.

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The third thing we can't do without is LOVE. Life becomes empty and meaningless without it. The continuation of society is virtually impossible without it. St. Paul calls it the greatest of the three. The New Testament declares that ALL ethical and moral responsibility can be summarized in one sentence: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love is more than an emotion. It's more than a vague religious ideal. It's a human ESSENTIAL, a present imperative. To love and to BE loved is the deepest and most desperate need of ALL our lives.

This is why Jesus came...to let us know we're not forgotten, that whoever we are and however we've failed, still we're loved by him. We need never feel rejected or unwanted or hated, because there is one at least who thinks each of us is so precious that he would readily die for that one person alone. Not only does he love us, but he's eager to be

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loved **BY** us. He won't turn us away, but will accept what we have to offer.

There's a bonus in loving God, by the way. When we love him, we automatically learn how to love others. And life becomes immeasurably livable.

So, faith, hope, and love...without them **NOTHING** is possible. With them **EVERYTHING** is possible.