

MY TOP TEN

Sermon 877

September 7, 2014

13th Sunday after Pentecost

962nd Week as Priest

789th Week at St Dunstan's

54th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

At about this point in the Church Year, when we come to the halfway mark in Ordinary Time, the thirteenth of twenty-six weeks, the lessons seem to lose a sense of cohesiveness or connection—with each other, I mean.

They are like serving leftovers after the great meals of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Holy Week, and Easter. We see stories repeated—like the Passover meal in the Book of Exodus, which was a beautiful set piece in the liturgy of Maundy Thursday, and opened our eyes to the understanding that the central act of worship in Judaism (the annual celebration of Passover) was transfigured by

Jesus on that Thursday night when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples in a new and unexpected way, making it the Lord's Supper, the first Holy Eucharist, which is, of course, the central act of worship in Christianity.

I'm not complaining, mind you. These sacred stories bear repeating, over and over again. The revisiting of them gives us another chance to see into the life of holy things, especially if we were not able to hear the stories at their earlier reading in the year.

Besides, I don't mind eating leftovers. Homemade vegetable soup almost always tastes better the next day. Cold fried chicken is one of my favorites. And garden peas, if they're not cooked to mush, should be eaten with relish, down to the very last pea.

No, there is something about returning to the familiar and essential stories of our faith that is helpful and comforting. Hearing them again allows us to realize that we have yet another chance—to be moved by them, to see something new in them, to open our hearts and minds to the working of the Holy Spirit.

The latest fad in the virtual world of Facebook is to post the Top Ten Books that have stayed with you, and helped to shape you into the person that you are today. Several of my friends, new and old, have shared with me their own sacred stories, if we can call them that.

So I thought I might give you my Top Ten sacred stories from the Bible, the ones that have helped to shape me into the man and the priest that I am today.

1. **The Book of Genesis**, which we are reading in our Adult Class in the Little House each Sunday morning in the hour just before worship, contains the most marvelous and essential stories of who we are as frail, fragile, hopeful, resilient human beings. The stories are ancient, but timeless.
2. **The Servant Songs** of the prophet Isaiah, written many centuries before the birth of Christ, which foretell of his suffering and death. They are beautiful and painful to read, and we hear them in Holy Week.
3. **The Call of Moses** in the Book of Exodus, which should remind us all that our LORD

delights in doing the unexpected, calling the unlikely, and expecting great things of us.

4. **Paul's Letter to the Philippians**, which is brief and yet filled with some of the very best of the Apostle's writing. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely ..." Return often to this letter and you will always be refreshed.
 5. **The Psalms**, which are intended to be read through, all 150 of them, on a monthly basis. If you find yourself in a tough spot, weeping and bemoaning your outcast state, go to the Psalms and you will find living water.
- 6. Paul's Letter to the Colossians**, another short and essential lesson for living. In particular I have found this singular message to be my mantra or motto in daily living. It comes at the second chapter, verses 6-7, and I like it best in the Good News Translation:

Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving.

7. **The Stories of Luke's Gospel**, which are not found in Matthew, Mark, or John. The Nativity of our Lord, always read at Christmas Eve. The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son, and more. Luke is our best gospel writer in terms of sheer storytelling ability, and I am grateful to read and re-read his work.
8. **The Gospel of Mark**, the first and briefest of the four gospels to be written. Mark contains only 16 chapters, and there is not a superfluous word to be found. He begins with John the Baptist at the Jordan River and ends with the astonished women at the empty tomb. You can read Mark in a single sitting, and it will nourish you and remind you and stick with you, like eating a turkey sandwich the day after Thanksgiving.
9. **The Beatitudes** in the Gospel of Matthew. Open your Bible to the fifth chapter, verses 1-12, and re-read this sermon of our Lord. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the meek. And you will be blessed.

And finally, on My Top Ten List, the day of Pentecost from the Acts of the Apostles. I am so grateful that we return to this sacred story year after year, and we experience the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, and they are filled with the stories of the mighty works and wonders of God. This is the story that points us to our present and future. We are reminded that we live in the Age of the Spirit, and that we are to open our hearts and minds to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit (knowledge, understanding, wisdom, strength, counsel, faith, and holy fear), and that we are to live daily in the Holy Spirit with the fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self control).

These stories make us new, they give us a second chance, they restore and reconcile us to

God through the love and grace of Jesus Christ.
They give us hope and a future. **AMEN.**

1,071 WORDS