

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Good morning. It is once again an honor and privilege to be with you today, to share a few thoughts about our scripture. Last Sunday we closed our observance of the Christmas season by celebrating the Baptism of Jesus, which also began for us our season of Ordinary time, during which we journey along with Jesus in his public life and ministry. We're still at the very beginning of that journey, and our gospel selection today contains the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is the one; Jesus is the Lamb of God, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit; Jesus is the one John has been waiting for, preparing the way for, and the one that he then urges his own disciples to follow. It's very fitting that this gospel is matched with a very beautiful first reading from Isaiah 49, when God says to the people of Israel, "You are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified." And of course these words do echo down to us through the centuries, not only as followers of Jesus but as servants too.

It is no small thing to be God's servants, and our world is by far a better place when we do our duties well. These duties for our children and youth are those of listening to the voice of God through their parents and in their hearts, and working faithfully to get a proper education. These duties for our young adults and older, are those of listening to the calling of God to choose a proper vocation, one that faithfully uses the talents and opportunities God has given us. And these duties, still later, if it is our calling, are those of marrying and loving well, and faithfully raising children, and working hard to support and guide them. And then there are the servant duties we all have to love and honor God with our lives, to worship regularly, to be loving and charitable toward those in need. I have been here at St. Bridget now for 27 years, and while I don't know everyone's name, I do know that you are good and generous people, and I have loved being with you all this time, and I hope I have a few more years to go! I know that you do try to be faithful to these servant duties and many more, especially those of education and work and family and charity.

But today I would like to hold up for you -- and to hold up for myself as well -- other duties that God is calling forth from his people Israel in our scripture today. It is true that God calls Israel his servant people. But God does not stop there. God does not stop there. God adds, "It is too little a thing that you should be my servant... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." A light to the nations. Salvation, reaching to the ends of the earth. God's calling for us does not end with our schooling, our families, our jobs, or even our outreach to our neighbor in need. Jesus came not just to his Jewish brothers and sisters, to Bethlehem, or Nazareth, or Galilee, or Jerusalem. Jesus went to Capernaum, and the gentile area across the sea of Galilee. Jesus healed the Roman centurion's servant. And Jesus died for all people, to conquer sin and death for all of humankind. And we come together today as his disciples, called to follow him, called to be a light to the NATIONS!

My confess my heart is somewhat heavy these days. It started just before the end of the year, when I got a little e-mail from Rev. Sally Kinney, the pastor of Community Ministry at Seattle Mennonite Church, in the Lake City area. They're the community that started the Sunday dinner ministry to the homeless that St. Bridget has been involved with for the last couple of years, and I know some of you help with that ministry -- I think it's on the second Sunday of the month. She was writing to her friends in ministry about the troubles with our state budget -- the fact that there's so little money, that programs WILL be cut, especially programs for the poor. She wrote: "This is a difficult time, and there are no easy or sure answers. What we must do is continue to tell our state representative and senators that this is simply too much pain to bear and they must do whatever they can possibly do to minimize it." And she ended by saying, "We will all have to do even more than we are now, to help our neighbors."

And just Friday, you may have seen this front-page headline in our Seattle Times: "Health budget cuts grim for people on the edge." Inside the paper outlines the problems facing the state, and the cuts we are facing. And that's not all of course; as we all know, the national scene is very difficult too.

It's not just that the economy is bad, unemployment is high, and that the poor are hurting more than you and I are. There's a collective feeling afoot that budgets need to be brought in line, and that therefore government programs must be cut. And of course, it's true -- you cannot endlessly sail the ship of government on a sea of red ink. But in an environment where the only choices are to cut programs, those who have no voice will suffer the most. Those who are already vulnerable will be even more at risk. And then, what becomes of our collective soul?

I'm proud of our parish charity and outreach. I am happy that we reached out to Tent City, that our Christmas giving tree helped out so many youth at the Orion Center and families at Sacred Heart Shelter and individuals coming to the Francis House. I think it's wonderful that we collect food every Sunday for those in need through our St. Vincent de Paul. But all of our charity will be more than undone by the cuts that are coming in services to the poor.

We are called to be a light to the nations! A light to our community, our state, our country. Our calling as Christians goes beyond our own life, beyond our own family, and even beyond our charity. Our calling includes **ADVOCACY**. Advocacy for those who have no voice. Advocacy for those on the edge whose health services are being cut. Advocacy for the homeless whose numbers will increase over the next year, and for those mentally ill on our streets whose services will likely be cut. Advocacy for the immigrants in our midst, who will be increasingly vulnerable to exploitation, even as they struggle to provide for their families. And my experience, unfortunately, is that however generously as a parish we reach out to others in charity, as a parish we have very little we can point to as advocates.

One parishioner whom I respect very much told me after our Saturday evening Mass that she felt scolded. Please understand, I'm not scolding you, if I have anyone to scold, it's myself. But I am trying to light a fire here today. We **ARE** a fine servant people, but our times call for more. Our scripture today reminds us that it is too small a thing to be a servant people, we are given to be a **LIGHT TO THE NATIONS**. And to be a light requires a fire, a passionate love, especially a love for those Jesus loved: the poor and the forgotten. I would hate for us to miss our calling. There is no better community in the city of Seattle for this task than St. Bridget. We are well-educated. We have strong families. We have a loving and generous heart. And many of us are well-regarded in our professions, with influence in wider circles. *We can do this!*

I find it sadly ironic. Next Tuesday I will be joining several others from St. Bridget and Catholics across the state for the annual March for Life in Olympia. And as we advocate for the recognition of the rights of the unborn, we should all be sadly aware that abortion in our country is once again on the increase. And that should be no surprise -- for if poor women have less available medical care, less community support, fewer choices for their families, there will be more abortions.

I confess I don't have the answer. However, my New Year Resolution is that I will work hard to encourage all of parish outreach efforts to include a component of Advocacy. I ask each one of us, as we encounter Jesus in our Eucharist today, to ask the Lord how we can better be a light to our community, and to our world, especially on behalf of those he loved so much.

Deacon Denny Duffell, 1/16/2011