

*June 28, 2009 -- Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*Wisdom 1:13-15, 2:23-24; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7,9,13-15; Mark 5:21-43*

Death, like life, is a mystery. One evening last week I called our congregational president to let her know one of our sisters was having chest pains and I might need to take her to the hospital; the president told me one of the other sisters out of town had been taken to her local hospital for testing. Two days later I called the congregational president again to tell her one of the sisters – not the one with chest pains – had died unexpectedly in the night; she told me the sister in the hospital for testing had taken a bad turn and was not expected to live. Now, a week later, the one with chest pains has just returned from a week at home with her family and the one not expected to live is due to be released from the hospital any day now to come home to the Motherhouse. Lives change in seconds. We never know what illness will end in death and what will result in long rehabilitation and who will have a miraculous recovery. But however it works out for any individual, just the mystery of life is breathtaking. All the cells and tissues, all the systems that have to work together, all the different species that balance life on this planet – what an amazing God whose image we are formed in!

*How do you celebrate your gratitude for the gift of life?*

*July 5, 2009 -- Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*Ezekiel 2:2-5; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Mark 6:1-6*

Years ago when I worked at a parish in Daly City, our church was on one side of Highway 280; there was another Catholic parish on the other side of 280. On several occasions, I asked people in parish groups, "What do people on the other side of town say about our parish? What do they think of us?" And the answer was almost always, "I don't think they think anything. I don't think they even know about us." I was the only one, I believe, who thought that was a very sad commentary, because if we had been doing our work as Christians, whether they agreed with us or not, whether they heeded us or resisted, they should have known that we were there because of our works. Having no reputation at all is almost worse than having a bad reputation. So when God sends Amos the prophet, so when God sends Paul the apostle, so even when God sends his only Son – whether we heed or resist, we will be touched and will know God has reached out to us.

*How do people experience the love of God when they meet you?*

*July 12, 2009 – Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13*

Well, obviously the plan in today's Gospel isn't very practical. I mean, sandals will do very nicely in California, but in rainy Southeast Alaska? (Of course, sandals *do* have good drainage!) And what are we to do for food and clothing and shelter? Are we just to trust to the people we encounter on the way? Why would they open their homes to us, in this day of electronic alarm systems and identity theft and deep background checks? And where am I going to store my CDs and DVDs, and my quilting fabric and supplies, and all my card-making stuff? Today's Gospel reading is a good reality check for us, and makes me wonder once again just how much of the "stuff" I have gathered do I really need? As I write this column, I have just over a month before I hear these readings proclaimed in church. When that happens, I will probably once again weed out my clothing, fabric and boxes of stuff in an effort once more to simplify. But trust? That's the hard part, the ongoing struggle – trusting God and trusting people.

*Do you need to simplify your life? How much of your hoarding is based on a failure to trust?*

*July 19, 2009 – Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34*

When I list the readings for each Sunday, I always make sure to list the Psalm, which is a passage from scripture (though not always from the book of Psalms – there are other psalms in the Bible!) – but I don't list the Alleluia verse, or Gospel Acclamation, which is equally a passage from scripture. Today's acclamation is from John's Gospel: "My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; I know them, and they follow me." This is a particularly poignant verse in light of today's Gospel reading, where Jesus and the apostles try to escape for a few days of rest – a mini-retreat perhaps. But the sheep hear his voice and follow him, and they no sooner get to the place of retreat when they are surrounded by a crowd of people "like sheep without a shepherd" – and Jesus resumes teaching. I suspect most people in church ministry can identify with this passage – it's very difficult to maintain the balance between being a good shepherd and maintaining dependent sheep.

*How are you like a sheep in your life as a Christian? How are you like a shepherd?*

*July 26, 2009 – Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145; Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15*

Mark's is the shortest of our canonical gospels, and our three-year cycle of Sunday readings allows for only a fraction of John's longer gospel to be read, so this week we begin a month-long journey with John, beginning today with the feeding of the five thousand and continuing through August 23 with the remainder of John 6, the discourse on the Bread of Life. That makes the month of August almost a retreat on the Eucharist. We can use the opportunity to renew our appreciation of the various aspects of Eucharist that are developed on these five Sundays, beginning this week with the feeding of thousands of people with five barley loaves, two fish and Jesus' prayer of gratitude. This feeding must somehow relate to the Eucharist, as it begins the chapter on the bread of life.

*What does the feeding of the five thousand say to you about the Eucharist we celebrate in our churches at every Mass, about the Body of Christ we share, and about the Body of Christ we are?*