

Homily for 9th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32

Romans 3:21-25, 28

Matthew 7:21-27

As you know,
preachers of the Word have been in the news quite a bit lately.
You've got the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, once Senator Obama's pastor,
whose take on things American didn't sit as well with most people
as they did with some in his own congregation.
Then you've got the Rev. John Hagee, an endorser of Senator McCain,
who professes love for Israel on the one hand
but has curious theological ideas about Jews on the other.
(Not to mention his curious theological view of Catholics!)

Most recently, Fr. Michael Pfleger, a Catholic priest,
has entered the political arena by preaching last weekend
at (where else?) Rev. Wright's former church
and coming down hard in his critique of Senator Clinton.
who, at this point, I'm sure,
is thanking God that she has no outspoken preachers on her side.

What grabs my attention here
is not so much the crazy, offensive things
that the Reverends Wright, Hagee and Pfleger have preached
but rather what a lightning rod each has become
in the presidential campaign.

The response of the candidates, the media, and the American public
indicates clearly that even when a preacher is a nut case,
what he says has impact on believers and non-believers alike.

Why is this so?

On a local level, it amazes me week after week,
that in this techno-savvy world of ours,
a world of sound bytes and flashing, changing images,
assaulting our senses at every turn,
millions of people around the globe,
and about a thousand in our parish,
pause every weekend and pay attention
to what a preacher says on a Sabbath morning,
pretty much sitting still for 10 or 15 minutes or more
listening to one person speaking about texts
that are between two and three thousand years old.

These ancient texts hold a place
not only in our corporate religious memory,
not only in this ritual moment,
but in our hearts and minds as well.

And why is this so?

Because somewhere deep within us
we believe that the words inside these big red books are, indeed,
“the Word of the Lord”
and therefore eminently worthy of our attention.

Frightening and humbling for me is the thought that
you trust me to break open these words, like bread for the soul,
week after week,
that we might be nourished by the Spirit within them,
the Spirit we believe to be as fresh in these words today
as in the days thousands of years ago
when they were first prayed, pondered, preached
and at some point put to print.

Isn't this what you come to this place each week to hear?

I wonder...

What word DO you hope to hear proclaimed, sung and preached
on a Sunday morning?

Let me take a guess...

You come to hear a word of life, not of death...
You come to hear a word of blessing, not a curse...
You come to hear a word of mercy, not judgment...

You come to hear a word that gives you
- answers to difficult dilemmas
- consolation in hard times
- a challenge when you need one;

a word of
- prayer
- peace
- and pardon;

a word of
- hope
- help
- and healing;

a word of
- wisdom
- truth
- and counsel.

You come to hear a word you can build your life on,
a word as solid as the rock in the gospel image today.

You want a word to keep you from building your life
on sandy ground.

You seek a word to keep the heart's home sheltered
from the storms of daily life.

Or perhaps you need a word to help you rebuild
after a stormy time has passed.

You want to hear a word that speaks to your heart,
a word that makes sense to your mind,
a word that makes a difference in how you live your life.

You want to hear a word that nourishes the core of your humanity
and touches you with a spark of divinity.

If such is the word you've come to hear
then you have come to the right place
because all of the above and more
are what the scriptures offer us
and a homily is meant to share with us.

But we must be attentive to the word proclaimed by the lectors,
sung by the cantors, preached by priest and deacon.

That means we have to pay attention, focus, listen and hunger
for what the Word might offer us.

The Word we break open here
tells the good things the Lord has done for us
and what the Lord promises us.
It's the message of the Word
that gives us reason to approach the altar
of thanksgiving and praise.

The Word of scripture and the words of the homily
open our hearts
to receive the Word made flesh
in the Body and Blood of the Word
in the bread and cup of the Eucharist.

May God who speaks the Word that nourishes us
feed us with the Word who saves us.