

### 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021 B

One of my favorite times visiting our school and faith formation classes is the question jar. The students save up questions on their minds, and what they ask – besides the perennial “how old are you?” – often reflects deep thought and connections they are trying to make with different parts of the Bible or history or science and their faith. Some are factual and can be answered with information so I can look smart. But many questions have no simple or clear answer – the meaning of suffering, or the reason God does not seem to answer our prayers, or why Jesus makes us wait. ***Then I don't feel so smart.*** Faith is not really a collection of information; it is a relationship with God. Faith may shape answers; but it also teaches us the importance of ***asking the right questions***, and of continuing to TRUST even when we do not KNOW.

***“No one dared to ask Jesus any more questions,”*** Mark tells us. Why? Just what were they afraid of? This question about the most important commandment of the Jewish Law was actually the third in a series of debates and dilemmas put to Jesus. Each was intended to trip him up and silence Him with some question he could not answer without looking like a traitor to either the Roman authorities or the Jewish faith. First, should they pay Roman taxes - and Jesus tells them they must fulfill BOTH their social and religious obligations; they could not pit one against the other and excuse themselves at will. Then the idea of whether there can be a resurrection and an afterlife – and Jesus tells the Sadducees not to misread Scripture or doubt the power of God. And finally this scribe poses the question often debated among the rabbis – did all the 613 distinct laws in the Torah bind equally, or was there one that is most important, a central key to the Covenant God had made with His people? So when Jesus yet again dissolves the question about LAW by insisting on LOVE as the key behind every law, they give up. They were looking for loopholes; but they found instead a deeper obligation. And so they don't dare ask more questions,

perhaps afraid of being embarrassed in front of their peers or making Jesus look even wiser, not worse, to the crowds.

Following Jesus will raise many questions for us as well, things that Google and Wikipedia just cannot answer. It may be things we don't understand about problems in our world or the tragic events that leave us feeling powerless. It could be decisions about what to do for aging parents or struggling children; or how to forgive someone who has hurt us; or sometimes just how to get up another day and keep trying when we feel like we are making no headway. We never need to fear bringing those questions to Jesus, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We may not hear clear and simple answers, but we will find peace the world cannot give.

I remember that at Confirmations, Bishop Kinney would challenge those accepting the Holy Spirit to ask the question: *What's the most generous thing I can do with my life?* Not what will make me wealthiest, or most popular, or most comfortable ... but what's the most GENEROUS thing I can do with my life? That question brings us to the heart of the Eucharist we celebrate, for the kind of love Jesus commands is precisely the love He gives us in this Sacrament. We pray today that Jesus will give us the courage to dare to ask Him that question about how to be generous... because when we ask it sincerely, and answer it with gestures of love and service like His, we know that we are not far from the Kingdom of God.