

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2022 C

One of the time-honored ways to read Scripture is *lectio divina*, reading a passage slowly and prayerfully, letting details otherwise overlooked to speak. Words create images, pictures in our minds. God tells Jeremiah that he will be a pillar of iron, a wall of brass. As a onetime trumpet player back in college, the brass part catches my attention. How tall is that brass wall as you picture it? How wide? Is it shiny like polished brass, or tarnished and dull? Freestanding or part of a larger building? Is the brass like a thin coating over something else, or is it thick brass all the way through?

Chemistry students will tell you that brass is an alloy of softer copper and tougher zinc, two elements that combine under heat to form something new. It's a good symbol for Christian life in that way: we are human beings, easily shaped by pressures and bumping up against hard things in life. But we are also strengthened by God's grace, made into disciples better equipped to resist the wear and tear of daily living, and polished by prayer, study, and love into something beautiful, reflecting God's goodness like good polished brass resembles gold. Where we need humbly to open our human weakness to God's strength, *in Jesus, God humbled Himself to embrace our human condition.*

I picture that wall of brass to be a solid part of some larger structure – maybe a foot thick and brass all the way through, not just a veneer that can be easily penetrated and reveal the more fragile material underneath. That wall of brass would stand up to whatever would come against it. Sometimes faith can be just a surface treatment, a thin covering that is easily dented or peeled away by disappointments, annoyances, losses and sufferings. But I am often inspired by people I meet whose faith is solid, all the way through, and who stand firm in trust when God asks them to make sacrifices, large and small. Faith does not keep all the problems and pains of life away; but it makes us strong, loving, and wise – sturdy

and enduring disciples of Jesus. That wall of faith will probably absorb a few dings and dents over time – even the risen Jesus was known by His scars. But with God’s grace and love in our lives, the struggles and problems that come at us will not get the best of us.

In this Gospel we go from “All spoke highly of Him” to then wanting to toss Jesus over the cliff in just a few verses. But in that dangerous moment, when the throng of His boyhood neighbors meant Him harm, Jesus did not argue with them or fight them; He did not belittle or berate them; He did not threaten them.

He simply walked away, right through the middle of them, for His hour had not yet come.

We too want to seek that way of Jesus, that way of Christ’s own courage, to walk THROUGH the challenges, serenely, confidently, with trust in the Father’s love. This is being delivered from evil, as Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer ... for while we cannot always avoid the troubles of life and go around them, God’s grace helps us find a way through them.

As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, today is a good time to remember those who taught the faith to you. How did you learn the Lord’s Prayer or the Hail Mary? Who helped you know how to make the Sign of the Cross, and what the Rosary is for? Who explained the Bible and the Ten Commandments, and why we eat fish on Fridays? We all have a natural capacity to know God, but it must be shaped and formed by other hands to receive what God has told us. Catholic education teaches with excellence not only about the world that God has made – learning about science and math and social studies and reading – but above all, the God Who has made it, to grow into an ever deeper friendship with Jesus. The information we learn comes and goes in our memories; but the love of God never fails us. Thanks to all of you whose sacrifices and kindness make possible handing on that treasure that endures into eternity.

Today, think of some of the things that weigh on your spirit, and as you come to the Eucharist, remember:

“I have made you a pillar of iron, a wall of brass. They will fight against you, but they will not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”