

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2020A

Not long after I was ordained, I was bringing Communion to Catholic residents at Good Shepherd in Sauk Rapids, when it was a much smaller place than today. In the other bed in the room was a woman named Clara – unresponsive and obviously near the end of a long life. Next to her sat her husband in his wheelchair, holding her hand. ***Although she could not see him, I believe that in a deeper way than our human senses can give, she knew that he was there.*** After decades of life together, he was at her side because he loved her – not for what she had done or could yet do, but simply because she was who she was ... his beloved, the one God had chosen as his life's companion. I knew nothing about that couple, and no words were spoken. But I was watching words of promise lived out that WERE spoken, no doubt many years before: ***"I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you, all the days of my life."*** Here was a couple whose whole life had been shaped and enriched by those words, gradually revealing what love looks like when it had been matured by the joys and sorrows of all the seasons of life. ***For them, as for many others, a word spoken in love produced much fruit.***

For the Jewish people, the word had power. In Genesis, God simply spoke, and creation came to be. Isaiah today proclaims that God's word remains effective. ***It achieves its purpose, never returning void.*** Our Christian ancestors gradually came to understand that Jesus of Nazareth ***was the Word of God***, the Second Person of the Trinity. Just as our words express – though imperfectly – what is in our minds and hearts, so God's Son, His Word spoken in love, PERFECTLY communicates the Father's mercy.

Through a word spoken in love by Mary – her “Yes, let it be done as you say” – that same divine Word is made flesh in the Incarnation. Jesus Christ IS love, mercy, peace, all the perfections of God, present among us IN PERSON. He is the final fulfillment of the vision of Isaiah: the Word sent forth from the Father, Who achieved His will to save us and set us free.

Here at Mass, the celebrant also repeats words spoken in love by Jesus at the Last Supper – This is My Body; This is My Blood ... and these words are also effective, and the Word is once again made flesh in the Eucharist. Then, WE receive that same divine Word in Communion, and WE ARE SENT FORTH FROM HERE to carry the Word into the World, to lift the words of the Gospel off the page and in a sense make the Word “flesh” once again in our place and time. We cannot MAKE this happen; we can only strive to be fertile soil for the Word. We cannot HURRY UP this Word; we must await God’s own time, just as the sower lets go of the seed and then must wait for the harvest. We do not know exactly what the outcome will be, just as the seed does not look like the full-grown plant – just as Clara and her husband no longer looked like they did on their wedding day, but had become something far more beautiful in their witness to God’s love.

There are so many words in a busy world – some deceive, others inform; some words wound, others heal; some discourage, and others inspire. This week, we ask God to help us be aware of the words we speak – or text or email – so that our lives, too, and our words will always bear witness to the power of divine love and mercy. Maybe a bystander will see, and remember many years later, how a word spoken in love and matured by faithfulness can produce a rich harvest.