

22 Sunday B

September 2, 2018

St. Patrick's

Theme: Letting God's living Word purify us to be "doers of the Word" with justice and love

"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls."—Words from the opening lines in the Letter of Saint James

St. Patrick's, starting this Sunday, for five weeks we'll be formed by the New Testament Letter of St. James. It was written toward the end of the first century. The next four Sundays, this Letter flails against the sharp divide between the rich and the poor. This Letter thrashes those who take advantage of laborers, not giving them a just wage. This Letter, we'll hear this month, hits hard at the root of *our* conflicts and wars.

It's fitting, then, that we begin hearing the Letter of St. James on this Labor Day. *This* Sunday, Friends, at the very start of the Letter, St. James focuses in on the basics. It starts off reminding us that God **"willed to give us birth by the word of truth."** Then St. James pushes that theme further, teaching us succinctly, **"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls."**

In the fourth and fifth centuries many men and women lived solitary lives in the deserts of Egypt, seeking God in silent prayer. Many of these first hermits in Christianity became very holy. Other searchers for God sought them out for counsel. One story from the desert fathers speaks about a young man who sought out a holy monk and made this request: "Father, I want to seek God in this wilderness, too. How can I become holy and happy?"

Don't *we* want to "become holy and happy," St. Patrick's?

"My son," said the Desert Father, "go over into one of those caves, taking with you this book of scriptures. Read it day and night and you will find what you are seeking." After three days, the young man returned, complaining that the reading was boring, that his mind wandered, and that he remembered little of what he read. "Do not despair, my son. You are doing fine. But do this also. Fill a woven basket with sand and set it just outside your cave. Every morning and evening pour a bucket of water over the sand. Come back in a week and we will talk." The

youth followed the older man's strange instructions. At the end of the week he still complained about his lack of progress in holy reading. "But about the sand, every time I pour water over it, some sand leaks out the sides of the basket." This same simple process continued, with the young seeker of God coming each week to talk with his spiritual father. Finally he reported: "Father, the sand is all gone. For the past two days I have been pouring water into a clean basket. But with the reading, I find myself just as lazy and bored and forgetful as ever." The old man rose. "My son, you are the basket. The sand is your sinfulness, pride, unhappiness. The water is the word of God. The basket doesn't remember the water that gradually cleansed it. No more do you remember every word of holy scripture that you read. But if you continue to pour the water of God's word over your sinfulness every day, some day you too will be clean." (1)

Yes, we heard this from today's Scriptures: **"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls."**

Then St. James immediately adds: **"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."** In fact, the entire Letter of St. James is a clarion call to live out in action the faith that we hold within our heart. And, St. Patrick's, that's part of our rich legacy here at St. Patrick's—reaching out to be of justice and of service to others, especially to those in need. But remember: Anyone can be a doer; we're called to be **"doers of the word."**

And so, we are called to let God's Word wash through our souls. We heard from Jesus' Gospel that a whole list of vices come **"from within people, from their hearts"**—vices like malice, evil thoughts, unchastity and greed. So, take advantage of the Bible—as examples, reading faithfully "Living with Christ" or reading from the Scriptures a little bit each day. During Mass, as the Word is proclaimed, at times I am embarrassed before God that my mind wanders far away, focused on something else.

But, like the young person in the story of the desert fathers, we're to let God's Word wash through us—even when our mind goes haywire.

Indeed, we need to be formed in God's Word. Next Sunday we'll hear about a follow-up from our "house meeting" process which we had at the start of this year. In small groups, we're going to gather this fall in order to **"humbly welcome God's Word that has been planted in" us.**

Friends: It's *God's* Word. And so, each time we say together, "***Thanks be to God***" because *that* Word will wash us anew, so that from deep within will come forth the harvest of God's grace.

(1) This story is recounted by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., The Catholic Bible Study Handbook: A Popular Introduction to Studying Scripture (Subiaco, AR: Subiaco Abbey, 1985), pp. 10-11.

General Intercessions

September 2, 2018 ----- 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Help us, your church, to welcome your Word within the Scriptures, and then put it into practice; we pray to you, O Lord—

Give healing and hope within the church universal, and within our Diocese of Memphis; we pray to you, O Lord—

On this Labor Day weekend, help the unemployed and the under-employed to find dignified work; empower us to ensure just wages and working conditions for all workers; we pray to you, O Lord—

Grant that we may take time to appreciate one another and enjoy the gift of holy leisure; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bless all the faithful departed with a share in the eternal life Christ has won for us, especially as we pray for Sanford Bernard Tollette, and all who have died from work-related injuries; we pray to you, O Lord—

(for the 8:30 a.m. Mass only--)

Bless Max, and his parents, on the day of his baptism; we pray to you, O Lord—

