

Open and Empty Eighth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, June 2, 2018 8:30 AM
Jude 17:20b-25; Mk 11:27-33 (Sts. Marcellinus and Peter, martyrs) “31st Year
Anniversary” Holy Trinity Our Lady of Fatima Prayer Community, Christ the King Parish,
Lombard (God is asking us to be discontent, to want more: the power and the love of God to
save, to deliver, to redeem, to make new.)

“Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

The point Jesus is making is that in order to have an answer to our deepest questions **we have to also be willing to commit**, and these scribes and elders and chief priests were not willing to commit themselves, partially out of fear of what people say and think, partially out of whatever, an unwillingness **to admit that something new and different is really from God. That is very threatening to a lot of people**; it was then, it is now that something new and different is really from God. But that’s the question: **who gave you authority; where do you come from?** Jesus’ answer is not obvious. Jesus’ answer is, “Well tell me something. How do you interpret John the Baptist? Is he from God?” And they wouldn’t say “yes” or “no.” **When we don’t say “yes” or “no” then God can’t do anymore.** We have put up a wall. So that’s what happened there and that’s what often happens now. **People put up walls. They don’t commit.**

Now you might think that the worst people in the world are the people who oppose the idea of God. Well not really; they at least are committed. What they are committed to is false, but at least they have committed. The real problem is noncommittal. **What is God going to do with the noncommittal?** St. Paul was committed; look what God did with him. He hated Christianity. He hated Christ. He wanted to crush the early Church, but God was able to use that commitment for his own purposes. But God can’t use for his own purposes noncommittal, and **too often that is what we see in our world and in our Church: noncommittal.** Surely our society is all noncommittal: not yes, not no. So that’s the problem we have; we have to face it. We have to realize **how rich our lives would be if only we could only commit a little more to this work of God** that was already at work in Jesus, actually already at work in John the Baptist.

So let’s go back to the beginning: **the beginning of this whole drama was the burning bush**, the bush that burned, but was not consumed. Now Moses when he saw the burning bush, burning but not being consumed, knew something was up. As he approached he heard, “Remove your shoes, this is holy ground,” an odd statement for a place in the middle of the desert. Ordinarily holy ground was the top of a mountain and often on mountains people had temples, but this is not a mountain, and it was out in the wilderness. But it was holy ground because **the real God, who manifested in the burning bush, is different from what people think.** That’s one of the most important lessons that we never learn, that God is different from what we think, the real God. And this was a manifestation of the real God. *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, I AM WHO AM.*

Now this is not the first time that human beings had met, so to speak, encountered, the real God. But as far as I know **it’s the first time the real God approached human beings.** Up until then it was always seekers, mystics, men of prayer, who went off into the mountains to seek God, who started to have some sense of who God was. But this is not that; this is something

different. This is something new. This is God coming to Moses. Why? Because God said, “I have heard my people’s cry.” This is the first revelation that the real God, who as I said was already known to great philosophers, **the real God is concerned**—that they didn’t know—and **listens to the cries of people, and in particular a people that was enslaved**. So this is another great lesson that the real God actually cares about those people who are enslaved, you might say, marginal—if you are a slave you are pretty marginal. And this is very basic to the whole story of the people of God, that they were marginal, outsiders, oppressed, enslaved, and **God heard their cries and came to the rescue, and built up a people**.

Now why did he choose that particular group? Well we don’t know, but let’s say there was a sense of their being available. Another insight is that we have to be available. And if we are crying out, maybe we are being available. So maybe that’s good. **God wants to hear our cries and God wants our prayers, because when we cry and when we pray, we are making ourselves available**. As I said, even before the time of Moses there were men of prayer who had come to know the God who is.

However in the history of the world **most people don’t worship the God who is. Most people prefer lesser gods**, so to speak, who turn out to be not very worthy of our worship. The lesser gods include all the idols and false gods of all time. St. Paul talks about the “principalities and powers.” These are forces, you might say, in the creation, more powerful than we are, but not really God, and not worthy of our trust, not worthy of our worship, not worthy of our love. And yet this is precisely what so many people trust and love and worship, or they love what those powers can provide like wealth, worldly power, fame, pleasure. **And when we are on that path we are entrapped, we are ensnared**.

Again, if only we recognize we are entrapped and ensnared and call out, **God comes to our rescue, and has in the person of Jesus Christ, and has in the gift and reality of the Holy Spirit**. Now it’s interesting Jesus said, “It is better for you that I go because if I do not go, the Spirit will not come.” Now he didn’t mean the Spirit isn’t always present. What he meant was **we have to make an opening, an emptiness, inside of us for the Spirit to fill**. Jesus knew that as long as he was around there would be no emptiness. He would be filling it with his presence. So he departed in the mystery of the Ascension, so that in his absence and in the grieving that would follow there could be a nice hollowing out of the souls of the apostles that the Spirit could come and fill. And as I said, the Spirit is always present. **So the coming of the Spirit depends on us being empty**, and that’s what we want to focus on, us being empty.

In the first reading from Judas—it says here “Jude,” his name is Judas, but people don’t like the name Judas any more. There were quite a few Judases. There is Judas Iscariot. Then there is another Judas. Then there is this Judas, but now people don’t use the word “Judas” except for one, Iscariot; they call him “Judas”; everyone else is Jude. Well this Judas says, **“Build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God and wait”**—and wait—**“for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. On those who waver, have mercy.”** Have mercy on yourself when you waver. Wavering is very natural. I believe even Jesus wavered; I think that’s the story of the garden of Gethsemane. That was a time of his wavering, but he was open to the Father’s will and angels came and ministered to him. **“Save others by snatching them out of the fire.”** That’s easier said than done. **“On others have mercy with fear.”** That’s an interesting statement: “On others have

mercy with fear,” in other words, be careful. **Those we love with God’s unconditional love and mercy can lead us astray because we waver too.** And that’s what Judas is saying: “On those who waiver, have mercy.” That’s a wonderful rule for a community. “Save others by snatching them out of the fire,” when that’s possible. “On others have mercy with fear.”

Be aware of how people can be misled. Just look at the world. Look at whom people follow; really who is the leader people like to follow? Well it depends upon who they are of course, but **many people follow bad leaders.** That’s because **they have very poor judgment.** There are people with a tremendous, sincere faith, but they follow leaders that are not from Christ at all. Some don’t even say they are. Some think that there are greater prophets than Christ, and yet they have millions of followers, millions. How can this be? This is because **God respects our freedom.** And because God respects our freedom **we have to really desire the true God,** who manifested himself to Moses. We have to desire the true God who sent Gabriel to the Blessed Mother to tell her that she would become pregnant with the power of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of her womb would be called “Son of God the Most High.” That was, incidentally, a title for Yahweh in the Old Testament. And “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves.” This is **the one who caused the bush to burn who is now entering into the tent of the Blessed Mother through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

And it is a blessed coincidence that today we began with the blessing of the statue, the image, of the Blessed Mother because **the Blessed Mother often is the servant of the Spirit in the world.** Her humanity, her femininity has often been the very vehicle the Holy Spirit has used to bring about a deeper realization of the true intentions of God, a God whom the Old Testament calls compassion and love, but who is often not believed to be compassion and love. **So Mary in her maternal love for all people is really furthering the work of the true God,** the one who burns with ardent love for all creation, but who is often spurned and mocked and ignored, even by the majority of human beings on earth. Indeed that’s the only explanation for the condition of life on our planet, that **the majority of people spurn and ignore the real God,** who burns with love for his people, that the majority of people have filled themselves with other gods, lesser gods, who are content with very little, who are content to be entertained and fed, and not much else. God isn’t really asking for us to be content. **He is asking us to be discontent, to want more,** but not more of what the world gives, more of what the world cannot give, what the burning bush originally came to announce: **the power and the love of God to save, to deliver, to redeem, to make new.** And the more we can actually desire that, the more it can come about.