June 21, 2015
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Asking God for Help on Our Faith Journey”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1: Job 38:1, 8-11
The Lord addressed Job out of the storm and said: Who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? When I set limits for it and fastened the bar of its door, and said: Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stilled!

Reading 2: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Brothers and sisters: The love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41
On that day, as evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples: “Let us cross to the other side.” Leaving the crowd, they took Jesus with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was great calm.

Then he asked them, “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?” They were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”

HOMILY
An atheist went on vacation to Scotland and was spending a quiet day fishing when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed both him and the boat high into the air, and opened its mouth wide to swallow him. As the man flew up and started coming down, he realized his imminent fate and cried out, “Oh, God, my God! H-e-l-p m-e!” At once, the whole, wild attack scene froze in place, and as the atheist hung in mid-air, this booming voice came down from the clouds, “I thought you didn't believe in Me!” “God, please, give me a break!” the man pleaded. “Two minutes ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either!”

Sometimes, we hear of people being on a faith journey. You might say that the fellow in that story was getting quite a faith journey along with his vacation journey. Today is the first day of summer, that time of year when many of us temporarily change our routine from our day-to-day activities, whether it’s school, work, committee meetings, whatever, and go on a vacation journey. Often enough while on vacation, we encounter different challenges that need to be tended to, issues that need to be resolved, sometimes roadblocks that need to be faced and worked around. In that
regard, I see some similarities to struggles we might encounter on a faith journey, so I thought we
might spend a few minutes and look at the two journeys. I have to admit that there’s a risk in this,
because some of you might start thinking of your own summer vacation now instead of listening to this
homily. So I’ll ask the Holy Spirit to help each of you ignore that temptation, and to help you focus
instead on these words. And, just to help you do that, I have a little bell here that I’ll ring once in a
while, just in case you’ve drifted off to the lake, or mountains or whatever – something to remind you
to mentally come back. <<ring bell>>

To begin, each of us is on a faith journey – a journey which started the day we were born and
continues until we pass from this life. On this journey, many researchers and theologians tell us that
our faith develops in steps, starting from the point when we were young children and we believed
anything and everything taught us, a simplified blind-faith of sorts. Then, logic arrives into our lives,
and later yet we learn about other faiths and value systems. Blind-faith gives way to questions, often
ones which aren’t easily answered. It may become easier for doubt to set in, especially if we aren’t
careful about looking for answers and how we accept life as it comes to us. Ultimately, with God’s
help, we’d like to reach a stage where we have complete faith, trust and confidence in God – living our
lives, enjoying our lives, helping others enjoy their lives, the way that God would want us to. Except
for any youngsters in the pews, many of us, maybe all of us at times, are somewhere in those later
stages on our individual faith journeys. We have questions, we may have doubts – and they may be so
strong that they may frighten us, or even rock the foundation that our faith development has been built
on so far. We look at our lives, and those of others, and the world around us, we might wonder, how
can there be a God, why isn’t God listening to my prayers, why can’t God let me get a job that will pay
the bills, why should we pay attention to the commandments or to Church moral law when it seems
others around me aren’t, why … why … why … fill in the blanks. … I spoke with someone a while ago who was struggling with the concept of a personal relationship with God – the person believed in
an all-powerful and all-loving God, but the personal relationship aspect didn’t click because the person
didn’t feel, didn’t sense God’s presence in life. It’s a tough, noisy, challenging world out there, isn’t it …
and a tough, noisy, challenging world for our faith journey.

So, what’s the good news for our faith journey? The good news is the Good News, capital G
and capital N, the Gospel of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. The good news is that our God is an all-
powerful and all-loving God, a God who does love us so much and does want to have a personal,
loving relationship with each of us so as to share everlasting life with us. The good news is that our
God wants each of us to succeed, wants us to get to that final stage in our faith journey, and the only
way to do that is to push us through those doubts, to help us look for satisfactory answers to our
questions, to find answers when we can or to help us understand the meaning of faith when we can’t –
trusting in what cannot be seen or fully understood in this world, to get to and then through even more
doubts and questions, to challenge us even further along our faith journey. The good news is that we
need to remember that God is always with us on our journey, always there to help us – and all we have
to do is … ask. We are not on this journey alone, as we heard Jesus say in the Gospel message of a
few weeks ago, just before He ascended into heaven, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

In today’s Gospel passage from Mark, Jesus and His disciples had a very busy day, evening was approaching and it was getting dark. Jesus physically challenged His disciples to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, to an area of Gentiles, pagans in the eyes of the Jews, across several miles of water in darkness, water which can suddenly turn very stormy because of the geography of the land around the water. But, Jesus was spiritually challenging His disciples, also. He was challenging them, as He challenges us, to move further ahead on their faith journeys, to encounter storms which would test their faith, to effectively grow stronger … in faith. The disciples continued on and did encounter a violent squall, with waves coming into the boat, so they panicked, asking Jesus if He cared that they were perishing. How many times do we encounter our own personal storms and want to say to God, “Where are you? Don’t you care about us?” This might be a good time to bring in our vacation journey analogy. How many times have we been on a vacation and something didn’t go right, maybe an important reservation was missed, or a wrong turn was made, wallet or cell phone lost – it would be easy enough to point the blame at someone, and often enough that happens, but the best solutions come about when those affected work together to resolve the problem – especially those who have a personal relationship with each other. Those times become opportunities to pull together and make those relationships even stronger – they become stories that are used to encourage others on similar adventures. So, returning back again to our faith journey, we need to remember that God is there every step of the way, waiting for us to ask, to work together to resolve any issues and to keep on moving forward – we can learn, grow stronger and encourage others from our own experience. And all we have to do is … ask.

But, Deacon Dave, how can I sense God’s presence to know what to do, how will I know that God hears my prayers? Just keep praying, you’ll know. It was 25 years ago, I had been working a lot of overtime for several years, the kids were growing up and I was missing my share of Little League games, etc, so I pre-planned to save my vacation time, bought a used motorhome, took the summer off, and my wife, Barb, and I took our 15, 13 and 10 year-old children on a Chevy Chase tour around the country – you know, where you would drive 100 miles to a national Park or important sight or landmark, stay just long enough to experience it, then hop back into the vehicle to head to the next one. We got on each other’s nerves once in a while, but learned to deal with that … we reconnected and had the greatest time. We prayed often on that trip, and we especially prayed for a positive outcome towards any issues that came up. Well, many issues did come up – and each time one did, we said a prayer, and the issue was somehow resolved. Maybe not how we thought, but resolved nonetheless. One story: we were leaving Los Angeles late on a Thursday night, and began heading back East. With all of my maps and booklets, I found a campground a few hours away, a short drive off the interstate. There were no other campgrounds within 30 minutes of that one, but I thought it was a safe bet, being Thursday. We got there about midnight, but the campground was completely overbooked, and many people had parked on the highway outside it. I looked around inside our vehicle at everyone asleep, found the next place 30-40 minutes away, said a prayer and began heading back to the interstate. Just
before the entrance, there was a side road with a sign that said “alternate route to interstate.” Something inside me urged me to take it. Less than half a mile down that road, there was a newly-constructed county campground, not on any map, with I believe only one other vehicle camping. I thought I was hallucinating. So, when you are away on your vacation journey, remember that God is with you always – include God in your lives and your issues will tend to be resolved more smoothly. All you have to do is … ask. <<ring bell>>

This weekend, we also celebrate Father’s Day, so we celebrate those fathers in our lives that have helped us on our faith journey. At the Rochester Catholic Men’s Conference last month, the speakers noted how important it is for the fathers in the audience, whether biological fathers, adoptive fathers, grandfathers, Godfathers, or anyone who has some responsibility in the upbringing of others – how important it is for them to live their faith, to be good examples to others around them, and, in a sense, to thereby help others on their faith journey. Then, last weekend, Kevin Spears, the Catholic Radio fellow who spoke at the end of each Mass, reiterated that same line of thinking. Finally, yesterday at the priest ordination at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bishop Matano told our own Fr. Carlos and the other two newly-ordained priests that they should not be hesitant to be called Father, because their spouse is the Church, and just like a father has no real days off when his children need him, a priest is always there when the people need him. So, Happy Father’s Day, Father! <<ring bell>>

Sorry, I couldn’t resist.

And now, let’s continue on our faith journey, celebrating our Eucharistic Feast as one family, the Body of Christ.