Reading 1  Isaiah 66:10-14C

Thus says the LORD: Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, all you who love her; exult, exult with her, all you who were mourning over her! Oh, that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort, that you may nurse with delight at her abundant breasts! For thus says the LORD: Lo, I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent. As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort.

When you see this, your heart shall rejoice and your bodies flourish like the grass; the LORD’s power shall be known to his servants.

Reading 2  Galatians 6:14-18

Brothers and sisters: May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation. Peace and mercy be to all who follow this rule and to the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.


[[]][ At that time the Lord appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household.’ If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. Do not move about from one house to another. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you.’]]] Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, ‘The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.’ Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand. I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town.”

The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name.” Jesus said, “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power to ‘tread upon serpents’ and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

HOMILY

An elderly woman walked into the local country church. A friendly usher greeted her at the door and asked politely, “Where would you like to sit?”
I’d like to sit in the front row, please,” she answered. "You really don’t want to do that,” the usher said. “The preacher is quite boring. You might even fall asleep.”

“Sir, do you happen to know who I am?” the woman inquired.

“No.” he said.

“Well, I’m the preacher’s mother,” she replied indignantly.
He hesitated for a second and then asked, “Do you know who I am?”

“No.” she said.

“Good,” he answered.

I’m not saying they were boring, but do you remember all those book reports and term papers and even 24-hour take-home tests you may have had to do for high school, maybe college, courses? Well, maybe you enjoyed doing them – I never did, at the time. I remember seeing a television show episode some time ago and it reminded me of the way I tended to handle those papers or take-home tests years ago.

I may not remember the details exactly, but the scenario went something like this: the character in the show also had a report to do, so he sat down at his desk to do it. But the desk was cluttered with miscellaneous mail and other items, so he proceeded to sort through the mail and file the rest away…. which took quite a while to do … He thought this would take away some of the distraction around him before really starting. But then, the lighting wasn’t just right, so he had to move the lamp and adjust the lighting to get just the right amount of brightness at his work area. The chair had an annoying squeak when he sat in it so, of course, that had to be fixed, but that meant first searching for and finding the right tools to do the job … which took a bit more time. Finally being ready to tackle that report, he realized he hadn’t eaten in several hours, so … off to find some snacks … which made him thirsty, and then getting something to drink. After all that, a little bit of drowsiness set in, so … You get the picture.

Procrastinators Anonymous would have loved this fellow, although I think I still carry some of that tendency to put things off, to procrastinate. Psychologists say that almost all of us do procrastinate, at least sometimes. We get distracted, we delay completing things, for a variety of reasons, and we may even procrastinate on the important things to do, while taking care of the easier, less-important tasks. Sometimes, we need to be reminded of the urgency of getting something done, the importance of doing something sooner instead of later, and we need to find ways, maybe better habits, to do that. Reducing distractions can be a great start. Having someone to help motivate, help encourage getting that something done, is also a recognized factor.

If you remember the Gospel reading we heard last Sunday, Luke records three men telling Jesus that they were going to follow Him. Two mentioned that they had to first go and take care of something else, but Jesus stressed the importance of not having distractions in following Him, the importance of not taking care of everything else that had to be done before following Him. Jesus noted the importance of following Him first, and all else would be taken care of. There was urgency in His tone! And then, in today’s Gospel reading, Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples, two-by-two, to various towns and places which He planned to then visit on his way to Jerusalem. These disciples were to announce, to preach, the Good News of His message, “The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.” And they were to bring nothing with them, nothing but the all-important peace of Christ, allowing them to heal the sick, heal the people of their physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological illnesses. The message was important! The message was urgent! The message could not be delayed! The message was so important that Jesus told them to, “Greet no one along the way.” Jesus wasn’t telling them to be impolite, but to not be distracted
from their goal, to not be distracted by greeting someone before their destination, greetings that would typically consume substantial time in their culture. And having two disciples go out with the message would benefit both the disciples as well as those in the towns and places they were to visit. They could reinforce each other against distractions, as well as jointly provide the message at the destination place.

The Good News of Jesus’ message is important and is urgently needed in our world today, and Jesus is calling each of us, His present-day disciples to be those messengers, to help deliver God’s message of peace and mercy, the peace and mercy noted by St. Paul in today’s Second Reading. That peace is not just an exterior facade, but a true, inner peace. And God’s mercy is available to all, to everyone, just for the asking. Likewise, Jesus is calling each of us to help deliver God’s message of love, God’s infinite love for everyone. But, it’s a human tendency to procrastinate, it may be easy to procrastinate in delivering God’s message of true peace, true mercy and true love, it may be easy to be distracted and confused by a world which offers false love, false mercy and false peace – both to the disciple and to the audience, whether one or many. As present-day disciples of Jesus, we are challenged to proclaim the culture of life and the value and respect of human life, every human life, from conception to natural death. We are challenged to affirm the sanctity of marriage and family life. We are challenged by a society which values material wealth as success in life, a society which is severely divided, and a society which is very much confused. We are challenged by an increasing attitude of relativism, where absolute truth is set aside and even ignored in favor of “feeling-good” and temporarily “being happy,” and the ends justify the means, often enough on both sides of the political aisle. And we are challenged to be messengers of Jesus in our world today, because we can be confused and distracted by the increasing passage of laws in our nation and world that are contrary to the Good News of Jesus. We are truly … lambs … among … the wolves. And so, we may procrastinate in our mission.

So, how can we prepare ourselves to be stronger disciples of Christ? First, we need to appreciate the importance and the urgency of the message, as much now as it was 2000 years ago. We cannot delay, we cannot procrastinate! The world needs to hear the Good News of Jesus as much now as then. We are in a spiritual, cultural battle, and God is on our side. … Second, we need to strengthen our own faith in the message, resolve any personal struggles we may have with parts of our faith, and find like-minded people and groups and support each other. We need to try to avoid the distractions which take us farther from our faith. … Third, we need to become more involved with evangelization. At the parish level, opportunities exist to be a religious education instructor for the youth, or help in adult faith formation efforts. Outside the parish, find a partner and participate in prayer outside Planned Parenthood and similar institutions, write letters to the editor and to our legislators, join St. Paul Street Evangelization, be a witness to our faith 24/7 to family, friends and others we socialize with. Above all … we need to pray, pray, pray!

Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” The message is most important, the message is very urgent, as much now, as ever. And, as faith-filled, Catholic-Christian disciples, our sure hope is that we are counted among those who are told by Jesus, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”