May 31, 2015
Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – “Stepping it Up as Disciples of Christ”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1: Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
Moses said to the people: “Ask now of the days of old, before your time, ever since God created man upon the earth; ask from one end of the sky to the other: Did anything so great ever happen before? Was it ever heard of? Did a people ever hear the voice of God speaking from the midst of fire, as you did, and live? Or did any god venture to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, with strong hand and outstretched arm, and by great terrors, all of which the LORD, your God, did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? This is why you must now know, and fix in your heart, that the LORD is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other. You must keep his statutes and commandments that I enjoin on you today, that you and your children after you may prosper, and that you may have long life on the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you forever.”

Reading 2: Romans 8:14-17
Brothers and sisters: For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20
The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they all saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

HOMILY
Today, we celebrate the Most Holy Trinity – we celebrate three Persons in the one, true God – and today’s scriptures challenge us in several ways. They challenge us to recognize that the God who created us, the God who created the universe and everything in it, the First Person of the Holy Trinity, wants each of us to enter into a personal and intimate relationship with Him as our “Abba,” our loving, our beloved Father. Today’s scriptures challenge us to embrace a more complete discipleship of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, and to accept that Christ is truly with us always, until the end of time. On that topic – if someone asked you how is Christ present with you now … if a Jehovah’s Witness showed up at your door, if your child, or grandchild, or friend, neighbor or co-worker were to ask you how is Christ present with you now … how would you answer that question? Likewise, how would you be … a more complete disciple of Christ? The answer to both questions involves the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. The Risen Christ works in us and through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit:
• enabling us … to more fully understand our Faith,
• enabling us … to help others more fully understand their Faith,
• enabling us … to proclaim the good news of salvation to the world,
• enabling us … to help the poor, the marginalized, the suffering, in Christ’s name.

So, Christ challenges us to be better disciples and left us the Holy Spirit to do so. How can we step it up a bit to be better disciples of His, to more fully live our Christian faith?

It’s often been said that the two things you don’t talk about, the two things that are sure to kill any conversation, the two things at the bottom of any ice-breaker list, are: politics and religion. I don’t believe that’s generally true of religion anymore. A quick story … Some weeks back, I took an impromptu after-lunch break and went for a short walk in the parking lot of my day-job. I rarely walk more than a few minutes, but something inside prompted me to keep on going the extra time to walk around the building. Turning a corner, I noticed someone in the distance, walking in my direction. After lunch, no-one else around, I found that rather odd. We caught up to each other, recognized each other as casual acquaintances, and did the usual “how you doing” thing that guys do. He commented, “Real well, Dave,” and something inside again prompted me to probe deeper. Over the course of the next few minutes, he noted that his life had been turned around; he felt much better in many ways – physically, mentally, and spiritually – and he owed it all to finding God … again … in his life. I mentioned that I am a deacon now and briefly told him what’s going on in my ministry. His interest grew, so we chatted another minute or two – and then, he completely surprised me, saying, “Let’s do lunch someday – really!” I walked away, recounted in my mind the promptings I had which resulted in that chance meeting, looked up and said, “Wow, Lord – you do have a plan, don’t you!” … God does have a plan, a plan for each and every one of us to be better disciples. And, how we respond to that plan, how we act within that plan, is in our court.

Today’s Gospel reading is often called the Great Commission – it’s the very end of Matthew’s Gospel, and Jesus is saying farewell to His disciples before ascending into heaven. But, He’s not just saying good-bye, He’s entrusting them, the remaining 11 apostles, to carry on what He started. That commission wasn’t just meant for one time, to those eleven. It’s meant for you, and for me – by our baptism into the family of God, we are called to learn our faith, and then help others learn it also. Now, you might be thinking, “Yeah, Deacon Dave, we’ve heard that before. But, I’m doing just fine, thank you. And, people around me are doing just fine, thank you.” But, no matter how fine we think we’re doing, Christ is asking for us to step it up a notch, to be better disciples, better followers, to live our faith. He’s asking us to be ready to share our faith with others at any time, and in order to share it, we had better know it. We need to know it, because we can’t share what we don’t know or understand.

How can we be better disciples of Christ?

There have been several news items recently which I believe we can relate to today’s Gospel reading, but I’ll talk about one in particular. Did you catch that phrase at the beginning, “When they all saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.”? The Greek word used by Matthew for doubt here is the same one he used in the story of the stormy sea when Peter climbed out of the boat and started walking on the water towards Jesus – doubt set in and he began to sink. That Greek word, distasas, means to stand in two places at once, or to “straddle the fence.” I was reminded of that when I read
about the biker gang incident in Texas a few short weeks ago, and in particular, a biker who “straddled the fence” in his beliefs – in fact, he had a beard split down the middle in color that represented that dichotomy … half white and half dark. He was an ex-police officer in the vice squad for 30-some years, and now here he is involved with the same issue, but as a gang member. Do you think that most, if not all, of us are like that fellow in some ways with our faith – we can “straddle the fence,” maybe living our faith during this one hour here at Church, maybe a few other times during the week. But what about the rest of the time? Jesus is asking for us to step it up. He is commissioning each of us to know our faith, and then to live it in our everyday life, to deal with others as He would.

Disciples of Jesus who live their faith are all around us … when challenged, they are ready to defend their faith, ready to defend life, ready to defend the poor, in Christ’s name. You may be one of them. You’ve heard me talk about Saint’s Place, our Youth Ministry and certain other parish-sponsored ministries in the past. Today, I’d like to talk about some others who live their faith. The other evening, Bishop Matano was the keynote speaker at a 25th anniversary celebration of the Women’s Care Center, a Catholic-centered crisis pregnancy and support organization, which has become the largest material-aid provider to pregnant and parenting women in the whole Rochester area, women from all religious backgrounds, including none. Even social service agencies call them for help sometimes. Pretty good for a non-government-funded organization! The bishop made the comment that he was blessed growing up, with meager means, but surrounded by the love of a family – he noted that the volunteers and staff at the Center provide that family-centered love to the women they help, the women they serve, who need that special love at such a critical time. They, and others who provide help such as that in the name of Christ, are disciples who live their Christian faith. … A few weekends ago, the 1st annual Rochester Men’s Catholic Conference hosted well over 500 participants on a daylong journey into their faith. Beginning with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Matano and joined by many of the seminarians and several priests, the packed house at St. Jude’s on the west side was then treated to three nationally-known apologist speakers, each offering a different take to the attendees on how they can be better disciples of Christ in their lives – on how they can witness to Christ, not just weekly, but daily, and in fact, all the time. Many people commented that they truly got something positive from the talks. I saw at least a dozen fellow parishioners there. One main objective was to encourage the formation of locally-based men’s groups, where men can share their faith among other like-minded Catholics. I understand that our newly-formed Knights of Columbus chapter, which Monsignor, Fr Bob and I all belong to, is considering being a part of that. You think men don’t want to talk about religion? I can tell you from personal experience, many do. And so do many women and teens. Many want to be better disciples of Christ, and want to know how to do it in this mixed-up world we live in. And what about those who have drifted from the faith, but whose faith journey has them returning, seeking a knowledgeable and understanding ear to listen or shoulder to lean on. What a tremendous opportunity to be a disciple of Christ at that time! … As a final example of discipleship, Pope Francis beatified the late Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador last weekend, putting him one step closer to sainthood. As you may know, Archbishop Romero, like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, truly believed in non-violence and was a champion of the poor, believing in the inherent dignity that all people have. Like Gandhi and King, Romero died a violent death, just about 35 years ago while celebrating Mass in a hospital chapel. Certainly, you will be
hearing more about him in the months ahead as the Church under Pope Francis pushes increasingly further into advocacy for the poor – just as Christ did – and celebrates those who do the work of Christ on earth, who are living their faith as disciples of Christ.

How can we be better disciples of Christ? I can almost guarantee that someday, you will be asked to share your faith, maybe even with someone you don’t know. The Holy Spirit will make it happen. But, you can’t share what you don’t have, and what you don’t understand. So, several quick suggestions – nothing new here, just friendly reminders:

- First, prayer – pray often, each and every day.
- Attend church and receive the Eucharist on a regular basis, receive the sacrament of reconciliation often.
- Be a good, Christ-like example to those around you – people are always watching, even when you aren’t aware of it.
- Get to know your faith better, and be ready to defend it. It all fits together like jigsaw pieces. Spend time reading, listening. Don’t back down when the subject comes up, don’t hide in a mental corner.
- Show your faith. Wear a lapel cross, put statues around your room, a holy water font, crucifix – let others know that you are “faith-friendly.”
- Listen to Catholic Radio, especially the very interesting and very informative call-in shows in the early evenings.
- Finally, be an active part of a Christ-centered ministry. See Father or myself if you would like some suggestions.

Now, let’s continue with our Eucharistic celebration, as disciples of Christ living our faith.