

12 Sunday A – Fr. Val Handwerker – Last Sunday as Rector of the Cathedral

June 25, 2017

Cathedral

5:00 and 8:00

Theme: Deeply rooted in Jesus, we're called as church to "acknowledge him before others"

"Do not be afraid," three times Jesus counsels us in this Sunday's Gospel. **"Do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father."**

We all saw the huge tree which fell across Central Avenue, near McLean, after the sudden storm on Saturday evening, May 27th. There's still the base of the tree laying across a yard, most of the tree having been cleared away. Out of curiosity I stopped by there in order to find out how old that huge tree was. I inspected it closely and realized that the tree pulled up all the roots when it toppled over. There's no way to count the rings of the trunk because of the roots and dirt clinging to the fallen tree at its base. Neighbors in the yard next to the tree told me that those who worked on cutting up the tree guessed it was more than a hundred years old.

What fascinated me were the roots of the toppled tree pulled out from the ground by the force of the tree falling. Indeed, there were tentacles of roots jutting out in every direction from the base of the tree. I was surprised, however, that the roots did not go very deep. From the base of the tree, the roots extended no more than ten yards. I have to admit, I'm no arborist, but for such a mammoth tree I would have thought the roots of that tree would have reached deeply into the earth in order to anchor it well and keep it upright and growing—even in the midst of an angry storm.

Cathedral members: Count the rings here—we have 95 of them! Yes, IC is ninety-five years old on this campus. Perhaps that toppled tree might give us a lesson. In order for this Cathedral Parish, the "Mother Church," to keep growing well beyond its hundredth anniversary, we have to have very deep roots. Precisely, Friends, we need to be rooted deeply in Jesus. By that, I mean that we can't just talk *about*

Jesus. We need to *experience* Jesus and his love for us. By grace we need to be a people rooted deeply in his living Word, the Scriptures. We're called to be rooted also in the Eucharist and the other sacraments of our Catholic faith.

“Do not be afraid”—yes, three times Jesus counsels us in the Gospel. For, you see, our calling as Jesus' disciples is to go out and, in Jesus' words, to **“acknowledge me before others.”**

As every weekend begins, in my litany to our parish's forebears who have died, asking for their prayers, I always turn to Monsignor Bill Davis. For many years Father Davis served as priest here at the Cathedral Parish. Actually, he came from this parish. I love to tell his story. Father Davis grew up just off of Lamar, and he was not raised a Catholic. When he was about sixteen years old, he came to the front door of the rectory, knocked on the door, and when a priest opened it, Bill Davis said that he wanted to become a Catholic.

Do you know *why* Father Davis wanted to become a Catholic? He later recalled that he kept noticing IC students, whenever he was riding a city bus or walking in the neighborhood. He knew they were from IC because of their school uniforms. What attracted Bill Davis to the Catholic faith was not their uniform. They seemed to be different from other kids. They showed character. They showed that they were rooted deeply in more than just themselves. And Bill Davis wanted that for his own life. Eventually, he became a priest and showed so many of us the beauty and strength of our faith.

“Do not be afraid...Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father.”

Sisters and brothers: This Cathedral Parish has a grand future if—and only “if”—we are deeply rooted in Jesus, the true Vine, and we being *his* branches (see John 15:1-8). Then, we'll go out and **“acknowledge”** this Jesus by the example of our lives out there. And we'll keep growing well beyond the century mark—growing strong and majestically as church!

“Do not be afraid!”