

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – July 9, 2017
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A few years ago, I was in my car and stopped at a traffic light, waiting to make a left turn. Suddenly, I heard the loudest explosion I had ever heard in my life. I began to look around thinking that some building had just blown up – as I turned my head from left to right, I saw that my rear, passenger side window had been shattered and there was a hole close to the center. My surprise turned immediately to fear and I ducked – or tried to as I was wearing my seatbelt at the time. I knew for sure that someone had shot out my window and I waited and worried that another shot would be fired. I grabbed my cell phone and nervously called the police. Amazingly, I looked up and saw no one running, no one screaming or crying. My life was in danger and no one else even noticed. When the police arrived, we determined that there was no bullet. A lawn service was using a weed eater nearby and the weed eater probably caught a little rock and hurled it right at my window. When I calmed down – about 3 days later – I was amazed at how a freak accident could have caused my heart to race, my hands to tremble. One little rock – which we never found – filled my heart with fear. I'd like to say that this fear was irrational, that it was completely unfounded. Upon hearing an explosion and seeing your back window shattered with a hole in it, which of us would have imagined a gun shot? Most of us, unfortunately. That's the world we live in. In former days, seeing a suddenly broken window, an accident would have jumped immediately to our minds. But we've heard too many news reports, we seen too much violence. We assume the worst and are relieved if it turns out *not* to be true.

In the gospel proclaimed a couple of weeks ago, Jesus told his disciples to fear no one – for your body can be killed, but your soul cannot. Today we hear him invite his disciples, invite us, to come to him when we labor and are burdened. In Christ, we will find rest. Rest, now there's a concept. Rest is what we are supposed to do when we're off work, when we get a chance to catch our breath, when we go on vacation. But between career and family obligations, most of us have too much to do as it is – rest is usually one of the things that gets sacrificed. We'll rest later, we tell ourselves, when things calm down, when we're not so busy. Only somehow, things never really calm down. There is no time when we are not busy – and so even when we try to rest, when we force ourselves to rest – rest doesn't come.

One reason we find it so difficult to rest is that fear and rest are incompatible. Oh, when we are afraid, we can manage to close our eyes, even manage to fall asleep, but that sleep will not truly be restful. Fear sets our hearts to racing, our minds to spinning. When we are worried or anxious or afraid, our mind travels at 900 miles a second – brooding on every problem, running through every troublesome scenario.

Rest can't happen in these times because fear crowds it out. Fear makes rest – true rest – battery recharging, life-renewing rest – impossible. Yet look at the world we live in – we can't escape fear without ignoring what is going on around us. We have to be realistic. We can't pretend that we still live in the Garden of Eden when Eden never had a crime rate, never had poverty or disease or war. Our solution, then, has been to balance our fear with temporary rest, with moments of hope. But in large ways and in small our fear returns to us – with the suddenness of my car window breaking or slowly, gradually, as our thoughts and worries and frustrations take over once again. Christ may offer us rest, but we can't seem to find it for very long.

Let us listen again to the first part of today's gospel. Praying aloud, Jesus exclaimed, "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to little ones." Well, that's a quandary, isn't it? Most of the time we want to be thought of as wise and learned – even when that is sometimes a stretch. We don't want to be "little ones." Yet here is Jesus praising the knowledge of little ones when those thought to be wise and learned were kept from such knowledge. What does a child know that we do not? As if by instinct, a child learns to depend upon his or her parent. A child understands that he or she needs their parent to provide food and clothing and shelter. A child understands that a parent is there to give them unconditional love and support and protection. Oh, sure, a child can feel fear, but it quickly subsides when their mother or father is there to reassure them, there to offer them comfort and support. A child is not immune from fear, but a child soon learns that – so long as their parent is around, fear fades away. Not so with us, unfortunately. We know the dangers of the world and we have a right to be afraid, we tell ourselves – and maybe we do have that right. Maybe fear is logical to those who live completely in this world. But Saint Paul today reminds us that we who have heard the Good News of Jesus Christ live no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit. Like the child, we need to remind ourselves of our absolute dependence upon our heavenly Father. We need to find our identity anew not as Memphians, or Tennesseans, or Americans, but as children of a loving God, a God who will protect us, and sustain us, and allow us to rest. But he offers us rest, he offers us the love and hope that will conquer fear, only if we take his yoke upon our shoulders – which naturally means putting our own yoke down. It means deciding to follow the path of Christ, not the road that we would choose. It means trusting in God to give us the love and the support and the rest that we need. Oh, we'll still be frightened from time to time by broken windows and tragic violence and the startling events that surround us – but if we recognize that God is with us in the midst of the turmoil, that God is with us in the midst of the danger, then our fears can be calmed, our hopes can be restored, and our lives will find peace.