

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Cycle A

July 11, 2020

Cathedral of the Assumption

By late August, early September, lawns around these parts often turn brown and brittle. Thirsty for even just a tiny bit of water in our driest time of the year. During last summer's drought, I began seeing *arbor vitae* shrubs dying in various places. I recently dug up three myself that didn't make it through last summer. During a prolonged drought, we wonder if things will ever green up again.

Even though we've enjoyed a fairly wet summer so far, many are feeling a personal dryness, wondering if our lives will ever 'green up' again. The pandemic has to some extent sucked the 'vibrancy' out of our liturgies—just look around at the empty seats. Social gatherings that reinvigorate us are severely limited. I ache to watch the Bats at Slugger Field or the Cincinnati Reds at the Great American Ballpark. We have come face to face with how far we've yet to go to overcome racial injustices that started 400 years ago. And the ever simmering political divides make it tough to see our way toward any semblance of unity of purpose. Even though things have opened up a bit, life still feels, well, sort of 'dry' to many of us, sort of 'one-dimensional.'

Isaiah, in the first reading was speaking to a people themselves thirsty for words of encouragement.. The Israelites had been living in Babylonian captivity, isolated from their own land and socially isolated from their culture for years. They had prophetic words promising a better day, but they wondered if those words would really lead to a re-greening of their lives. And so Isaiah likens God's promises to a weather pattern the Israelites would be familiar with back home. In Palestine, mid-May until late September is completely rain-less. The land cracks open; vegetation dries up. But then early Fall rains fall from heaven's rivers to soften the parched earth so seeds can be sown. Then Winter rains make the crops bear abundant fruit. Even though there is variability in timing from year to year, they would have experienced the overall pattern as very reliable. Isaiah says God's word, God's promises are like that. Exactly when or how God's word will bear fruit is not rigidly determined, but **that** the harvest will come is assured. God's promising words **will** eventually rain down fulfillment.

Now, some really Good News is that God's word will indeed issue forth a refreshing and renewing time for us too. A time when this pandemic will no longer snuff out the lives of the vulnerable; a time when the dryness of restrictions will be slaked; a time when we will learn more and more how to respect each other's dignity, differences notwithstanding. The dryness of human interactions will be watered with God's word and bear a new harvest. The schedule may be uncertain; the climate of human interactions will be subject to 'local conditions,' but God's word **will** bear fruit just as surely as the rain shall come down, making the earth fertile and fruitful. God's word shall not return to God void, but will achieve the end for which it was sent. We are a people of hope and so we believe that!

But we have a part to play, beyond just waiting. God's word will do its thing only if we are open to receiving it. If hearts are softened enough to absorb that word we can 'partner with God' in getting ready for refreshing changes. For example, human ingenuity, patterned after God's own creative spirit, will eventually solve the puzzle of this virus. Hundreds of scientists all over the world are feverishly responding to the creative spirit God has planted within the human family to make it happen. Selfless sacrifice of our personal freedoms help hold off illness in the meantime. We **can** create a community of oneness, not dependent on race or country of origin or sexual orientation or political allegiances. Because the always refreshing shower of God's spirit can penetrate hearts open to God's word.

A recent *National Geographic* article dealt with a dire shortage of summer water in northern India near the Himalayan mountains. Farmers for year have depended on melt from winter snows to do their planting; then later in the year they had depended on melting glaciers to water summer crops. But probably due to climate warming, the snow now melts too early for Spring planting and the glaciers have retreated so far up the mountains to not be helpful for growing the crops. But a very low tech, but ingenious solution has provided the needed water during the growing season when it's needed.

In the dead of winter, streams high in the mountain are gravity fed to a pipe in the lowlands, extending as much as 100 feet in the air. A nozzle at the top of the pipe sprays water toward the earth which freezes and build up a huge tower of ice. The towers of ice melt during the summer, providing more than 100,000 gallons of water, depending on its size, during the growing months.

One way or another, God's creative power built into the human spirit **will** slake the thirst of the earth and the thirst of God's sons and daughter who dwell on that earth. We all have reason to trust that God's word **will** bear fruit. It always has. And that's what makes us a people of hope!