

The Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 7, 2016

There are two themes in today's readings that are meant to help us in our becoming true disciples. The first theme is faith and the second theme is preparedness. Together, faith and preparedness are the fundamental tools of everyone who call themselves a disciple.

Faith, of course, is an essential element of our Christian life. We talk about faith all of the time. The Scriptures are brimming over with references to faith but do we really know how faith works? How does our faith operate each and every day in our lives?

Franciscan priest and spiritual director, Richard Rohr, uses baseball to illustrate how faith works and how real faith differs from simply going through the motions of religion. "Faith is so rare," he said, "and religion is so common because no one wants to live between first base and second base. Faith is the in-between space where you're not sure you'll make it to second base. You've let go of one thing and haven't yet latched onto another. Most of us" Fr. Rohr concludes, "choose the security of first base."

Our reading from the Book of Wisdom gives us a good example of this baseball analogy by calling our attention to the wondrous circumstances of the Hebrews leaving Egypt for the Promised Land. Now we may think that the Hebrew people would have been excited about leaving their lives of slavery to the Egyptians. But the fact is there were many of them who were frightened about stepping out into the unknown.

Sure, their slavery was a hardship, but it was a hardship they KNEW. Life as a slave was horrible, but at least they knew that they would have some food to eat and their families would remain intact. They were afraid to leave first base...a place they knew...for the promise of second base, the land of milk and honey that was far away and their journey would be filled with unknown dangers and doubt.

In the second reading from the letter to the Hebrews, the author has given us the example of Abraham and Sarah. It was their faith in God that led them to leave their lives of safety, wealth and security to places they had not planned to go and among people they didn't know.

Then, when at last the promise of God was fulfilled and Isaac was born, they had to allow for the unthinkable possibility that Isaac's life and destiny were not entirely theirs to plan or protect. From deep within their hearts they had to cling to a faith that neither of them saw or understood, but they never stopped trusting in God.

Abraham and Sarah's faith kept them moving forward when every fiber of their beings yearned for the safety, stability and familiarity of first base.

You see, faith doesn't mean having all of the answers. Faith means having the strength and courage to carry on, even when we don't know the answers to all of life's questions.

Jesus recommended this same quality of faith to his disciples. In today's Gospel, Jesus proposed that their faith would dispel all fear.

In between the letting go of the things of this world and acquiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit that motivate us into true discipleship, we experience a kind of limbo, during which we can only survive by having faith that the God who was with us on first base will also be ready to meet us on second base and accompany us around the field until we reach our true home in heaven.

And none of us knows when that will be. That's why we have the responsibility of being ready for Jesus' return because we have been entrusted with His Good News. So now that we have the Good News, what have we been doing with it? Most likely we know we are all basically good people, good parents, and good citizens.

But is there something more we can do, or does some part of our responsibility as disciples need attention?

Like the Hebrews who were unwilling to let go of the false security of slavery, we too often find ourselves enslaved by sins we can't seem to escape. Among these might be materialism, pride, self-centeredness, laziness, anger, bitterness, envy, addiction, sins against chastity and there are of course many others that keep us from getting past the first base of discipleship.

There's no doubt that the cost of discipleship is high and requires a radical laying down of our lives.

Of the original twelve Apostles, eleven would eventually suffer martyrdom, not because they felt that if they did they would earn their way into Heaven, but because they had a *relationship* of love with the very real and tangible Person of Jesus Christ.

And that's why over the next couple of weeks you are going to hear a lot about ALPHA. ALPHA is a program we will be offering to the parish starting in September that will help us increase our faith and preparedness and make us more effective, missionary disciples.

So please stay tuned!