

Twelfth Sun – Ord C 2016

June 19, 2016

Fr. Pick-a-Word!...That's the nickname that Fr. Ken Roberts calls himself...Some years ago, about 30 of our Assumption teens, myself and other adult chaperones heard Fr. Ken preach twice at a Catholic youth Conference. ...What makes his preaching so unusual, so different, has to do with his nickname: Fr. Pick-a-Word. ...In his homily, Fr. Ken picks out one key word from the Gospel of the day...and digs deeply into that word's meaning and significance to help explain what is happening in the Gospel passage,...and what the main message is...It makes for a very effective homily, but it's not easy to do,...so I've never tried it...until now...As I read and reread today's Gospel, it eventually hit me that –for me - the core, the heart of its message, resides in a single crucial word...Let's look again at our Gospel and see if you can pick out the key word that I picked out to preach on.

*Refer to Slide 1 on screen...*Here's a hint: it's a small word and It appears twice...It comes out of the mouth of Jesus...Ok, give up?...*Refer to Slide to on screen...* There it is, that little, old everyday word **MUST**...A little word, but a powerful one, at least in the way Jesus uses it. ...Let's see just how powerful it is... In the Gospel scene, Jesus first asks His disciples who the crowds, the people, say that He is...From their answers, it's clear that the people do not really have a clue who Jesus is...Then, Jesus asks His disciples,..."Who do you say that I am?"... Now at the time, those guys had been with Jesus for about two years,...with Him nearly every day, ...listening to Him,..watching Him,...learning from Him...Was He a good man?...Sure...A good teacher?...definitely...A miracle worker?...Amazingly, yes...But who do they really think Jesus is?...Peter answers for all of them..."you are the Christ of God."

The word "Christ" is the Greek word for "anointed ."...The disciples had come to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited anointed one,...the King, the Messiah, anointed by God the Father to deliver the Jewish people from Roman rule, and restore the nation of Israel...That was their hope and expectation...But almost before the words "Christ of God" came out of Peter's mouth, Jesus proceeds to tell them that things aren't going to go the way they are thinking...He isn't going to be the "kick-the-Romans- out-of-town" type of king....He isn't going to rule from Mt Zion...Instead, He tells them "The Son of Man **MUST** suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders,... the chief priests... and the scribes,... and be killed....and on the 3rd day be raised. ...He uses the word **MUST**,...because this isn't something Jesus can take or leave...This **MUST** happen for Him to be the savior who delivers us from our sins...This **MUST** happen for Him to carry out God's plan of salvation...There is no other way...Those words from Jesus must've hit those disciples like a ton of bricks...They didn't get what Jesus was saying...They didn't get that the Messiah,... the Christ, **MUST** suffer on His way to glory.

After having told His disciples what path He had to take,...Jesus then made it clear to them what it would take to be His disciples..."If you believe I am God's chosen one,...and you want to be my disciples,...then you **MUST** deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me...If you want to save your life, you will lose it,...but if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it."...That had to be the worst possible job description ever used to recruit someone for a job. ...But, Jesus believed in full disclosure...If they were going to follow Him, they needed to know the cost...Notice He said, " you **MUST** deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me..." ...There's no other option... you're either all in,..or you fold.

So, what is this Gospel saying to us here in 2016?...Well, it's saying to us just what Jesus said to those 1st disciples...If we want to be His follower, we **MUST** - that word again – we **MUST** deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him... Again, there's no option...We are either a

follower of Jesus or just one of His fans cheering Him on from the sidelines... 2000 yrs ago, Jesus needed committed followers to take His Gospel to people and places that desperately needed to hear it,...and He needs committed followers today to live His Gospel in a world many believe is on the path to utter destruction.

That's the mission Jesus calls us to – you, me and everyone of us who claims to be a Christian, ...and it ain't an easy one...When Jesus says we MUST take up our cross and follow Him,...He doesn't mean the kind of cross He carried to Calvary...It's not very likely we will have to die for our faith...though there are many Christians in other parts of the world living under that constant threat...The cross Jesus is talking about is the cross of rejection and ridicule and hatred we may suffer when we stand up for and live by His values rather than the world's, when we speak out against the ways our world has turned away from G.: Like the sex, violence and vulgarity that saturates our entertainment;... the wanton disregard for the sacredness of all human life; ... the prejudice, intolerance and distrust that keep us from loving our neighbor; ... laws and regulations that threaten our religious freedom;...the growing gap between the well-to-do and those living in poverty,...just to name a few...In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to decide... Do we accept this mission and the cost it may come with, or are we comfortable settling for a religion that asks no more of us than to come to church and put our envelope in the basket? ...Here's a parable you may have heard me use before, but it's message is one that needs to be heard again and again.

It's about a church made up of geese: the First Geese Church of Christ... It was at their Sunday morning service. The pastor waddles up to the pulpit and begins his fiery sermon by asking his congregation,... "What kind of birds are we?" ... "Geese!", they answer.... "That's right!" the pastor shoots back. "We are geese!.. God made us to be geese, not ducks or sparrows or crows." "AMEN!" the people shout, honking their approval..."And what are these things God has given us, these MAJESTIC appendages?" ... "Wings!" they answer ... "And why did God give us these fine wings?" .. "To fly, pastor! We can fly with them!" ... "That's right...God wants us to fly. Moles can dig; lions can hunt, but WE can fly!...We can soar above the clouds! ...We can fill the skies. Praise the Lord! We can fly!".... "AMEN!" they shout, "ALLELUIA!"...Then the pastor challenges his flock. "If God wants us to fly, then what do we gotta do?".... "We gotta fly!" they yell back ... "We gotta do what?" "We gotta fly!"... "What?"... "FLY!" When the service is over as the congregation of geese is leaving the church, they all stop to tell the pastor how very inspiring his sermon had been that morning.....AND THEN.....they all WALK home....They all WALK home.

You see what often happens.....We come here every week and listen as the Word of God is proclaimed and preached...We hear about God's unbounded love and mercy, about how Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sins, ...and we are strengthened by His Body and Blood to go out from here and take His Gospel into the world. ..We may not respond by shouting AMEN and ALLELUIA....but we know in our hearts what Jesus is calling us to do. ..Yet, what so often happens, is we're like those geese in the parable...We walk out of here no different than we were when we walked in...We leave here with no sense of being on a mission. ...Those geese were given the mission to fly - to fill the skies – because that's what God made geese to do. We've been given the mission to take up our cross and follow Jesus...to stand up for Jesus, regardless of the cost, because that's what God made us to do.

At the start of my homily, I chose to focus on the word "MUST", bec Jesus used this word to tell us that God's plan for our salvation had two absolutes, two non-negotiables....First, Jesus His Son **must** suffer and die and rise again...and second, Jesus's disciples, His followers **must** carry on His mission to bring the Good News of God's endless love and mercy to people everywhere...Well, Jesus has carried out His mission....It's left for those of us who call ourselves His followers to carry out our mission.

If it seems like a daunting one...It is...That's why we need the Lord's help...So, in a few minutes as we come forward to the Lord's table,...let our prayer be something like this: "Lord Jesus, I accept this mission...but I need your help...I need your strength and your courage to step up and stand up for you and everything you stand for....Lord, please help this goose to fly!"
AMEN!