

August 13, 2017

St. Mary's Assumption, Bronson

9:30 a.m.

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time/150th Anniversary of Parish

Praised be Jesus Christ! That beautiful and very traditional Catholic acclamation sounds a lot like the acclamation St. Paul used to end the passage we heard just a few moments ago in today's Second Reading from his Letter to the Romans: "*Blessed be God forever*". In that passage, he was trying to help his own people, the Jewish people, to realize that "the Christ"---the Holy One of God---was born of their lineage: truly a reason to give praise to God the way he did.

That's what we do every time we're able to come together here as God's holy People to celebrate God's Presence among us, in Word and in Sacrament, which causes us to say: "Praised be Jesus Christ!" But in an extra special way today, we have even more reason to give our praises to Jesus and our gratitude to God as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of this parish community.

Even though from the first settling of this area by John Bronson as far back as the late 1820's, there were a handful of Catholics who made their homes here in this area and occasionally----once a month or so----would be able to celebrate Mass together as a traveling priest, Father Charles Rychaert, would make his way around the circuit of small Catholic communities in the general area, celebrating Mass usually in one of the people's homes, most often in this area in the home of James Cunningham. Ironically, this Bronson area was a mission of the closest parish of St. Charles Borromeo in Coldwater, established 150 years ago, and Father Cornelius Korst, the pastor of St. Charles became the pastor of this mission here in Bronson and built a small church in honor of Our Blessed Mother's Assumption that same year---150 years ago. Eventually, in 1884, St. Mary's received your first resident pastor, Father Francis Kroll.

Over these 150 years, Fr. Rychaert, Fr. Korst, Fr. Kroll, and the other 14 priests who have served as pastors of the faithful people of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, up to and including Father Mark, have done so in a couple different locations, and in several different church structures in which St. Mary's people have gathered during that time; but all along the way, God's Holy Word has been taught, the Mass and the Sacraments have been celebrated, and the Faith has been passed on from one generation to the next for the past 15 decades.

And that's why, with St. Paul today, we say "Blessed be God Forever", and I joyfully join with Fr. Mark and all the parishioners today in giving thanks to God

for all the good that has taken place in bringing thousands and thousands of people to God.

God's Holy Word for this, the 19th Sunday of the Year, is so appropriate for our special celebration today, and reminds us that our God is unpredictable and comes to us in many different ways, according to our need at the time.

In our First Reading today from the First Book of Kings, we heard about the great Prophet Elijah. He was running away because the Queen was after him and wanted him dead; so he was trying to get as far away as he could go. He walked for 40 days and 40 nights and got to the holy mountain of God, Mt. Horeb. He found a cave on the mountain and hid there; he thought he had found safety. But the Lord spoke to him and said: *"Go outside and stand on the mountain....for the Lord will be passing by."* Elijah, as most of us might tend to do, expected that the Lord would come to him in some kind of dramatic and powerful way. So when the strong and heavy winds blew up, he was sure the Lord would be there; but He was not. In the same way, there came an earthquake---but the Lord wasn't there either. And then came a huge fire---but the Lord was not in the fire. Ah, but then-----*"there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face...."* For he knew that he was in the Presence of the Lord in that *"whisper"*.

Perhaps we too tend to look for God in the dramatic events of our lives, but if that's the only place we look for Him, we will miss Him in all those *"tiny whispers"* of life all around us. Our God reveals Himself to us as *"I Am Who Am"*, and He has sent His Son to bring us salvation because our God is *"God with us"*--Emmanuel.

If we don't find God in our lives, it's because we're not looking for God, not because God is not there; God is everywhere, in everything, and with us in every event of our lives. The primary place for us to find God is in His Son Jesus Christ.

As we heard in the beginning of today's Gospel Reading, St. Matthew tells us that Jesus had just miraculously fed the 5,000 people with the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the people were sent home satisfied. Jesus told the apostles to get in the boat to go back to the other side of the Lake, while He went up the mountain to spend some time in prayer with His Father. So, while the apostles were in the boat, and Jesus is on the mountain top, a storm came up on the lake in the middle of the night, and,-even though most of the apostles were experienced sailors, Jesus could see that they were in serious trouble. And so in a very dramatic way, Jesus transported Himself from the top of the mountain into

the midst of the stormy lake, and began walking on the water toward the apostles in the boat that was in danger of capsizing!

Just try to imagine that?! It doesn't get much more dramatic than that! Of course, the Apostles were scared to death, and seeing the figure coming toward them Who looked a lot like Jesus, they thought they were seeing a Ghost. And that's when Jesus said to them: *"Take courage!....It is I....Do NOT be afraid!"*

My dear Friends, our Loving God is with us at all times, in all ways, and in the midst of whatever storms or challenges we might ever encounter. He may show Himself to us in the "tiny whispering sound" of a dear friend's or spouse's "I love you", or "It's going to be OK", or "I forgive you". He may show Himself in the dramatic reminder that even when we're scared to death, He assures us that we have no need to be afraid because He is with us. And our Loving God definitely shows Himself to us very clearly, really and truly, in His life-giving Word and in the Sacraments of the Church, most especially in this Holy Mass, as we are privileged--almost beyond our wildest imagination---to receive Jesus Himself, really and truly Present in the Eucharist, to be our spiritual Food and Drink. .

There's no doubt that much has changed since the days of the first members of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish back in 1867 and the days in which we live here in 2017. But what doesn't change is God's nearness to us----His Presence with us----His unconditional Love for us. What doesn't change is the power and salvation found in His Holy Word, and the life-giving direction found in the teachings of Jesus' Church, shepherded by our Holy Father, our Bishops and our priests.

In today's Gospel, we saw St. Peter once again kind of getting ahead of himself. He asked Jesus, if that was REALLY Him, to let him come and walk on the water as Jesus was doing. Jesus said: "OK---give it a try!" And we all know what happened. The point is that Peter wanted to be just like Jesus. The fact is that Jesus was able to walk on the water because He was God, and Peter was not. What Peter should have done was just to stay in the Boat and welcome Jesus into the Boat. Of course, as we know, the Boat has always been the Symbol for the Church----the great Bark of Peter.

We would do well to learn Peter's lesson of humility and reality. We are not God. Only Jesus is God. So we need to do two things: We need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus so we don't drown in the stormy waters all around us. And

secondly, we need to stay in the Boat, rather than thinking we're going to find happiness, success, or contentment somewhere else, outside the Church. It won't happen. The only way to ultimate happiness is for us to remain faithful to God in this life, so that we can gain eternal life with God forever in Heaven.

On this very special day celebrating 150 years of this great parish of St. Mary, honoring the Assumption of our Blessed Mother, let us ask our dear Mother Mary to help us always to do what she did as the greatest of all the disciples of Jesus to ever live: to learn to say "Yes" to God's holy Will as she did throughout her life, and continues to do from her Heavenly Throne, as she intercedes for us and guides us to stay close to her Son Jesus. With the help of our Blessed Mother, with the constant reminder that we have nothing to be afraid of as long as we stay in the Boat of the Church of Jesus Christ, and with the reminder to look for the Presence of God in the dramatic events of life as well as in the sounds of silent whispers of God's merciful and unconditional Love, may St. Mary of the Assumption Parish continue to give glory to God for another 150 years and for generations to come. With all that we say and do, may we keep proclaiming:
Praised be Jesus Christ!

God bless you!

Bishop Paul J. Bradley