

16th Saturday in Ordinary Time, Cycle II/ St. Sharbel Makhluf Memorial
July 24, 2010
Fr. Joe Bambenek
Most Holy Trinity Church, Fowler

Jeremiah 7:1-11

Psalm 83

Matthew 13:24-30

Sing: How lovely is your dwelling place Oh Lord mighty God.

When one stands in this beautiful church, it is not hard to imagine today's psalm response. Yes, God's most visible dwelling place in Fowler is certainly lovely. In fact, when I was back in Minnesota and first read the scripture passages the Lectionary prescribes for today, I thought of how fitting it was to have such a psalm. And when I next read the gospel and its story about the wheat field, my imagination immediately went to the luscious fields that surround this little piece of heaven on earth. Although with modern farming technologies and the skills of the Fowler area farmers, I suspect there are fewer weeds in the fields around Fowler than in those through which Jesus walked.

As I look around inside this impressive building, even more beautiful than the dwelling place of God that is this church are the numerous dwelling places of God which I see in the pews. As we know from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, each one of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. God made us in our totality, including our bodies, in His image. We are not disembodied spirits. Instead, God created us such that through our bodies we express love to one another. Through our bodies we serve one another. Through our bodies we participate with God in creating new souls and bringing new life into the world. As we are doing this morning, through our bodies we can give glory to God in worship. When Jesus came to Earth to redeem us, He did so by taking on a human body. And Jesus saved us by dying through that body. Rather than being something bad, when God lovingly created us as human beings, part of the gift He gave us was our bodies. Regardless of how perfect or imperfect our particular body may be in the eyes of the world, it is sacred to God and it has great dignity. It is His temple. And He wants us to keep it beautiful, and not to defile it, because how we act through our bodies does matter.

Yet, how often are our bodily actions reminiscent of the field in today's gospel story: a mixture of wheat and weed-like actions? Sometimes we, through our bodies, perform great acts of self-giving love. And then, before we know it, we find ourselves acting very selfishly or not respecting God's temple in someone else. It is because of this fact of human life: that while we were created good, we each have the weakness of original sin, Jesus came to save us. And it is in part because of this fact that Jesus continues to come to us in the sacraments, especially the sacraments of penance and Eucharist. The Eucharist is like fertilizer that helps the wheat grow. And the sacrament of penance is like a herbicide that kills the weeds without harming the wheat. Just as the good farmers of Fowler take advantage of the new agricultural technologies to allow for lusciously-fruitful fields, we have the opportunity to use the gifts of the New Covenant to transform our hearts and our bodies into ever more luscious, fruitful, and beautiful temples of the Holy Spirit.

This morning I return here to Fowler to give thanks through my body... Thanks, first of all, to God for the gift of my life and the vocation for which He made me. Thanks to this parish, in particular, for its generosity in allowing the use of the Fr. Ray Center for planning meetings of the REFRESH and REFLECT retreats which were an important part of my life, and my

priesthood discernment, during the last few years prior to entering the seminary. I also give thanks to the people of Fowler for the excellent witness of faith that they have been to me; what a truly remarkable community you have. And I am here to say thanks for the gift of friendship with several parishioners, most notably Scott & Darcie Schueller and Luke & Tricia Goerge who have been so supportive on my journey to the priesthood. And also for the gift of friendship with a number of friends who I see came this morning to celebrate with me from across southern Michigan, from Grand Rapids to suburban Detroit.

As we prepare to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, as we prepare to bring Him in a literal way into the Temple of the Holy Spirit that He gave us, let each of us strive with ever more resolve to be a truly beautiful dwelling place of the Lord... Each in keeping with the beautiful way that God created us, in the unique vocation He gave us.

Sing: How lovely is your dwelling place Oh Lord mighty God.