

6th Tuesday in Ordinary Time, Cycle I
February 15, 2011
Fr. Joe Bambenek
St. Luke's Church, Indianapolis

Genesis 6:5-8,7:1-5,10

Psalm 29

Mark 8:14-21

Do you still not understand?

As those who were at daily Mass yesterday may recall, just before the start of today's gospel passage, the Apostles got into a boat with Jesus to cross to the other side. As we heard today, once they left the shore, they realized that they were short on food. In previous passages from the Gospel of Mark, the Apostles witnessed Jesus miraculously feed two large crowds. Nevertheless, in today's reading they are in a tizzy about how they are going to eat, given that they have little bread. At the same time that their minds are distracted by the lack of bread, Jesus wants to teach them a different and important lesson. He wants to warn them about the dangers of King Herod and the Pharisees. Dangers that threatened to undermine Israel. Dangers that would ultimately lead to the destruction of Jerusalem. Dangers that would lead to His own death. Yet they were not able to understand, because they were focused on getting enough to eat, rather than on listening to Him. They were in a panic, even though they had already witnessed Him do 2 miraculous feedings. We can learn from this passage what kinds of issues God wants us to focus our mental attention. Furthermore it gives us confidence that He wants to provide for us when we are focused on what is important to Him.

Do you still not understand?

I must admit that question seemed relevant as I was trying to figure out on what topic to preach. But after an unusually long period of time of wrestling with the passage, the gospel suddenly became clear and personally relevant to me. In fact, I came to realize how incredibly appropriate it is with respect to the reason I am here to celebrate Mass with you today. As I mentioned at the start of Mass, my name is Fr. Joe Bambenek. I was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis Minnesota last May. I have come here today to celebrate with you a Mass of Thanksgiving for my ordination. You may be wondering why a strange priest from Minnesota is here to do that? The reason is that between 2002 and 2005 it was not uncommon for me to be at this Mass a few times per month, following a day of business meetings up in Carmel. And I must sheepishly admit, it was not unusual for me to arrive at Mass about now, in the middle of the homily. During those years, I would travel to Carmel about once per week on business. Also, at the time, my life resembled the Apostles in today's gospel reading in an interesting way. When I made those business trips, I knew I would be leaving my job for the priesthood; in fact, I had even turned down several job offers that would have been large promotions and I was even taking seminary prerequisite classes much of the time. During those years, I was already in the boat with Jesus you could say, heading toward the other shore of seminary and priesthood. But, like the Apostles, it was not an entirely peace-filled ride. I was worried about questions of bread; among them, I was struggling with the question: how would I financially make it? How could I transition from a 6 figure salary to 5 years of unemployment during seminary, followed by a life-long priest salary? During those years I needed to grow in trust that if I followed God's will, He would somehow take care of me materially. Being able to participate here in daily Mass after my Carmel meetings, and often spending an hour in the adoration chapel after Mass, helped feed me with courage and peace. Here at St. Luke's I received a bit of the spiritual food I needed to remain in the boat with Jesus on the voyage to the

seminary shores. So it is for that reason I come here to celebrate; to say thank you to St. Luke's parish and its people for having a daily evening Mass. To say thank you for having enough dedicated pray-ers to keep going an adoration chapel. Given that I was fed here in Word and through the Eucharist, celebrating this Mass with you seemed like the best way to express my gratitude. [*after spontaneous applause*] Thank you, but the homily is not quite done.

But I suspect that I am not alone. Perhaps today there are some of you who God is calling to get in the boat with Him to another shore. Maybe one or two of you He is calling to the priesthood or religious life. For more of you, to some form of deeper service of Him and His people. My message to you today is that of the gospel reading: do not fear, while there are real dangers, God will take care of you if you follow His will, if you stay in the boat where He wants to take you. He will provide for you; He will not let you starve in the middle of the lake. He will give you all you need, and with it great peace and joy.

Do you still not understand?