

Homily by Monsignor Michael Hazard

St. Joseph Church, 936 Lake Street, Kalamazoo Michigan 49001

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

August 28, 2011

The message of the Scriptures today swirls around one point. The Gospel with its emphasis on how differently God sees things from the way we tend to; Jeremiah, where the anguish of speaking the word of God is surpassed only by the anguish of *not* speaking it; the Letter to the Romans, where Paul challenges his listeners to make themselves putty in God's hands. It all has a single center-point.

At the heart of the message, today as always, is Jesus.

What is so absolutely unique about him is that, in his completely human life, he reveals God to us.

When Jesus reveals to his disciples that he must suffer grievously, that he must die, and even rise from the dead, they are stunned. And Peter, who was the one who correctly identified Jesus as the "Son of the living God," now takes Jesus aside and tries to point out to him how impossible that would be. But Jesus, who knows in the depth of his being that all this *has* to happen, springs back at his chief disciple and scolds him *exactly* for trying to take him aside from the path that Jesus recognizes as God's will, God's plan.

The message is partly about suffering, but not suffering as if it were something good in itself. Rather, the suffering that follows naturally from doing what God calls one to. *Because* God knows what we must painfully learn: that we don't live for ourselves but for one another.

"Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves," God had said. And part of that likeness is relationship, a relationship of giving and receiving, of gift-giving and gratitude. Not of taking, appropriating what belongs to another, but of patience and encouragement and unselfish love.

And obedience. Remember how, in the early moments of the gospel Jesus had that confrontation with the devil in the wilderness? Once and twice and a third time, Jesus rebuffs the malicious spirit *drawing on the word of God* in the Jewish Scriptures, putting his absolute confidence in the trustworthiness of God. Now comes Peter, a friend, a disciple, who, like the Satan of the desert, seeks to get Jesus to think a different way, a short-sighted and selfish way. Jesus recognizes the tempter: *Get out of my sight, Satan!*

Jesus must live up to his calling. He must remain true to himself. Which means seeking and following the Father's will, the truth of things: that we are not, indeed, made to pursue our own convenience or comfort of happiness, but to serve one another generously, and in this way to create a community of respect and care and love. There—here—everyone stands a chance of living a truly human and fulfilling life. In this community (St. Joseph's community at its best) we welcome one another, rather than seek our own advantage or defend our own turf; we go out of our way to help one another rather than just expect to be taken care of. It may be that we will sometimes lose sight of the ultimately other-centered pattern of life that our likeness to God signifies. But Jesus, like Jeremiah before him and St. Paul after him, will keep calling to our attention the deep truth that faith in God will be our salvation, and doing God's will is the path to life eternal.

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Those difficult words, bewildering to our minds, challenge us to think, to ponder: Those who want to save their lives will lose them. Those who seek to keep their life safe from others will not like the result. Those who give their lives will find the fulfillment we all long for.

How does it work? What Jesus knows by faith, we come to believe: that *God lives for us*, that eternal life is to know God and to allow the likeness of God in us to direct our actions.

This faith of ours in the grace of God—the faith of Paul, the faith of Jeremiah, the faith of Jesus himself—is what drives us, enables us, unites us. Here at this table we celebrate our communion with and in Jesus Christ. Let's take a minute of reflection on this