

## Homily

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT

October 6, 2019

A bishop was sailing to a distant part of his local church when he noticed an island off to one side in the distance. He asked the captain who, if anybody, lived there. The captain told him only three hermits. The bishop asked to be taken there so he could meet these hermits.

So they directed the ship towards the small island. As they neared, the bishop got into a small boat, reached the shore, and then spied the three old men, holding hands on the shore watching the bishop as he arrived.

The bishop introduced himself, an unworthy servant of God and shepherd of this local church. The three men bowed in unison. The bishop began to teach them about the work of the church and of faith. The three men acknowledged the bishop's teaching with great attention. The bishop asked them what they did to serve God and save souls. The middle one answered, "We don't know how to serve God and here there are no other souls but us three. We care for and support each other." The bishop asked the three how they prayed. Again, the middle one answered, "we pray together since the one on my left has no teeth and only stammers and the one on my right can only mumble through his thick beard." "Show me," commanded the bishop. So they looked up and began together, "Three are ye and three are we; have mercy upon us." Then they lowered their heads.

The bishop smiled, "You know of the Trinity, but you do not pray right. Let me teach you." And he began to teach them the Lord's Prayer. He continued until each knew all the words and each could pray on his own and then finally together.

It was now dark, and the moon shone brightly. The bishop blessed the three hermits and departed on his boat for the ship, and the three were lost first to his ears then to his sight.

As morning approached before the sun broke the horizon, the bishop saw in the distance a bright light quickly approaching the ship. And then he saw three figures from which the light seemed to flow. These three figures, holding hands, running on the water as if it were dry land, quickly arrived at the side of the ship and said, "Good servant of God, we tried to remember the words of the prayer you taught us, but eventually we lost words and the prayer fell apart. Could you teach us again?" The bishop's heart swelled; he smiled at them and said, "Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God. Please pray for us sinners." Then he bowed low before these holy men; and they turned and went back across the sea. And the bright light continued to radiate from them until the morning sun eventually took them from his sight.

The bishop in our story learned a great deal about faith from these three hermits. It doesn't take great wisdom; it doesn't take great knowledge; faith can be a simple thing. These three

only wished to please God. And no distance, even across water, could stop them from trying to recapture the words of the prayer taught to them by this bishop.

If only we had that much faith. But we do have faith. We have faith that the words proclaimed here are truly the Word of God. And we have faith that Christ is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the appearance of simple bread and wine. And we have faith in small things, like someone will be here to proclaim the Word of God and that someone will be there to pray the words of consecration. You and I would not be here if we did not have faith.

The bishop had faith. He had faith in what he taught these three men; he had faith in the Good News or he would not have shared it; he had faith in the Words our Lord taught us or he would not have taught them.

But when he saw the faith of these three men as they ran upon the water as if it were dry land, well, that kind of faith humbled him. It humbled him to the point that he knew they didn't need his teaching; he needed their prayers.

How often are we humbled by the faith of another? How often are we humbled by God's many gifts to each and everyone one of us? How often are we humbled by God's creation, especially in simple things like the hermits' simple prayer?

The bishop didn't truly look at these men until their faith came running at him full speed and in a bright light.

When we look at another, do we see someone who needs our teaching, our direction, our instruction? Or do we see the miracle of God's many gifts bestowed on each of us?

We serve God when we look outside ourselves and share our gifts with one another. That is so very true.

And we humble ourselves when we look outside ourselves at the gifts made manifest in others around us.

Just as Jesus, Who IS God, emptied himself and took the form of a slave, we must empty ourselves, acknowledge that we come from nothing and, only by the grace of God, do we accept the gifts He has given us and become what we are, children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ and here for one another.

Let us leave here today in celebration of the gifts God has given us, but also celebrating the gifts God has given to others.