**June 17, 2018 – 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**Fr. John Edmunds, ST**

There seems to be something in the human spirit that responds to making a list of the things to do. You go in the office each day and schedule the day. Wives are famous for providing their husbands a “honey-do” list. At the beginning of each semester students create a calendar on when each paper needs to be handed in. Books provide us with to-do lists: Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Organizations give us to do lists: the twelve steps of A.A. There is a TV show named Eight Simple Rules. Even in religion there are lists: the Ten Commandments, the Five Pillars of Islam, the Eight-fold Path of the Buddha. So you would think that Jesus would do something similar and provide us a list of the things we are to do in order to be faithful followers. No such to-do list exists. The only list Jesus provides – the Beatitudes – is more about attitudes than actions. When you look at Jesus’ teaching style you can see why he does not provide a list of things to do. Instead of a catechism style question and answer where there is only one correct way to respond Jesus taught his contemporaries in parables. “With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.” I wonder if that style drove his listeners a little crazy. Instead of answering why he welcomed sinners and ate with them Jesus told them a story about the Prodigal Son. In response to someone wondering “who is my neighbor” Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. Seldom in any of the gospel accounts does Jesus answer a question in a direct manner. “Without parables he did not speak to them,” according to St. Mark. What is going on?

Let’s look at how a parable works. Parables are, for the most part, simple stories usually drawn from daily life. In talking with Galilean farmers Jesus used images of scattering seed on the land or looking at a mustard bush. These are things that made sense to farmers and that they could all relate to. The thing about parables the way that Jesus used them is that they are open ended. You have to take the parable inside of yourself and warm it up with your own reflections to figure out what it means. Jesus does not say how a growing seed is like the kingdom of God or why a mustard seed compares with the kingdom. The hearers have to complete the parables for themselves. They have to question the parable and see its implications. There isn’t any pat answer but only the one that you supply. How different that is from most instruction where the teacher has the answer and you have to come up with it. Jesus was a different kind of teacher – one who trusted that the listeners could figure things out for themselves.

Think about what that means. First of all, that Jesus taught in that way serves as a reminder that we are fearfully, wonderfully made. Only those created in the divine image could come up with the divine truth. Second, Jesus trusts us. Instead of insisting it’s my way or the highway, he gives us the room to find faith for ourselves. And third, that means that insisting that there is only one right answer runs counter to Jesus’ teaching style. I think this is what Pope Francis asks us to ponder as we re-consider what it means to be Church. Simply to keep repeating the received answers from the past saying “we’ve always done it this way” might not be enough to be true to the gospel. We must take those traditions and reflect on their meaning in our own hearts.

Which brings us to today. How do we become people of the parable? We can begin by doing as Jesus did and looking around in our daily lives to find God’s presence. We aren’t farmers so we have to bring the stuff of home, work and school into our reflection on God and the things of God. If Jesus were walking the mean streets of Chicago instead of the dusty roads of Galilee I can imagine him saying something like: This is how it is with the kingdom of God: you go into a room and turn on the light switch and the light comes on. You are not exactly sure what electricity is but you are glad that it is there to power up your life. Without electricity existence would be dull and cold. To what shall we compare the kingdom of God or what parable can we use for it? It is like dark matter. It accounts for 80% of the universe but we can’t see it or feel it or interact with it. Yet because it is there all that we can see holds together in one great harmonious dance. How about you? What elements of your life reveal something of God?

The reason we can do this is that all of life is a parable if we have the eyes to see it. God is hidden in plain sight. As we wander through life there are things or events or moments that speak to us of God if we just woke up and noticed. Creation is a parable. It seems to be about atoms and molecules, events and causes, history and biology. Actually creation is the medium of God revelation of beauty and imagination and inspiration. Jesus was a parable. He seemed to those who knew him to be a human being much like any other human being. He was in fact the beloved of God who broke the barrier between heaven and earth and won for us eternal life through his salvific death and resurrection. And we, every one of us, is a parable. We might look like a bunch of ordinary Joes and Joans but we are, in fact, made in the divine image. We are beloved of the heavenly Father. We are destined for glory. When we understand things as Jesus does, as revelatory of God we will be able, like the poet, “to see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower.”