

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent, Cycle B March 15, 2009

**Readings:** Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

### Faith Seeking Understanding

St. Paul writes in our second reading this morning: “*Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom.*” The Jews acted only on faith and looked for signs and prophecies to guide them. The Greeks tried to use their intellect and wisdom to try to find and know God. But Paul tells us that neither approach alone will lead us to truly know Jesus because Jesus is a stumbling block for the blind faith of the Jews and Jesus seems foolish to the arrogant wisdom of the Gentiles.

To find and know Jesus requires a balance between faith and reason. We cannot start with wisdom and determine what we should believe; we need God to reveal that to us. But once the faith is revealed to us, it will not grow and become complete without an attempt to understand it. St. Anselm calls this *faith seeking understanding*. St. Augustine tells us: “*Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.*”

Back in 1993, Jenni and I underwent a significant conversion; our Blessed Mother brought us to seek a closer relationship with her Son. And we traveled to apparition sites in prayer, but also looking for signs. We met a lot of people who were strong in their faith along the way, and we read and listened to tapes and watched videos to know more about the content of our faith; what we should do and how we should act. So two years later, as I was starting my journey to become a deacon, I was not a happy camper as I started my seminary training in a classroom with a bunch of seminarians half my age to study philosophy. I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder. I thought I already knew my faith and didn't need it being questioned by all this philosophical mumbo jumbo. I hadn't yet been introduced to St. Anselm and St. Augustine.

But fortunately I had a wise and gentle teacher. His name was Monsignor Vigneron, you may know him now as Archbishop Vigneron. He taught me an appreciation for *doing philosophy*, lovingly seeking wisdom, as a means for growing in faith. And of all the courses I took at the seminary, this one was the most valuable. Philosophy literally means love of wisdom. The philosopher pursues wisdom, and his journey will never end because it is impossible to know all things; only God can do that.

And so it is for each of us on our faith journeys. Unless, of course, you are like St. Paul and get knocked off a horse, your faith journey will usually be made up of a lot of little steps. We have some portion of our faith revealed to us through the Word of God in Sacred Scripture or through the Church, and then we work to understand that faith and how it fits in and how it is consistent with the world around us. And this gives us ownership of our faith. And as we journey, seeking this understanding, we inevitably are exposed to new pieces of revelation and we work then to understand how these pieces fit in with our bigger picture. Our journey of conversion should last our entire lifetime. We must all continue to grow in faith through understanding and never stop learning.

If we depend only on our wisdom to know God, we will never find the place to start our journey. If we depend only on blind faith, we will know where to start, but will

stumble trying to get out of the starting blocks. I encounter both kinds of people. The first group, the intellectuals that depend on their wisdom, aren't usually going to be found here in church on Sunday morning; they're home reading the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. But many of us who attend church every Sunday, can have a tendency to stop somewhere along our faith journey, to think that we know our faith, and now just want to look for signs instead of for understanding.

Some put their faith in strong spiritual leaders or in people who claim to receive messages to such degrees that it can almost have symptoms of a cult. There are some who spend hours on the internet reading and forwarding messages from unapproved apparitionists, locutionists, and seers. It is good to try to read the signs of the times, but do so with a discerning eye and ear. Test what you see and hear to make sure it does not conflict with what God has revealed to us through scripture and the Church. Ask yourself what you would do differently if you knew of some impending catastrophe or disaster. Whether a disaster is going to occur or not, you should do the same thing: repent and follow the gospel message.

In our gospel this morning, we hear how Jesus did not want people to follow Him just because He was a miracle worker. St. John states: ***“While [Jesus] was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He Himself understood it well”***

It is our human nature to want signs, but Jesus wants our faith. Miracles and apparitions and signs lead us to Jesus, but our faith cannot be dependent on them. As Jesus told St. Thomas: ***“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”*** Pray this Lent for the gift of faith and conversion. But then do not sit back. Work and study, read and learn; try to understand what it is you believe.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**