

**Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
(Mar. 6, 2011)**

The Power of the Word

Our readings today speak to us about the word of God. In the first reading God speaks through Moses and tells the people to take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Jesus in the Gospel says everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock and nothing could destroy it.

Let me tell you about a great saint who heard the words of God and acted on them.

St. Augustine recounts in his Confessions how he resisted the word of God for many years. His mother, St. Monica had prayed for his conversion from a dissolute pagan life to Christianity. But he would have none of it. He was having too good a time. At one point he was living in Milan and became curious about his mother's religion and started reading about it. He met another great saint, Ambrose, heard some of his sermons, and became even more interested in Christianity. One day, he tells us, he was in his garden, feeling depressed when he heard a voice chanting over and over, "Tolle . . . lege! Take . . . read." The voice continued to urge, so in his curiosity he picked up a Bible, opened it to Romans 13:13-14 where he read, "Let us conduct ourselves properly, as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh."

Now you might think that such a demanding exhortation would have put him off even more, but so strong was the word of God to him in this moment that he allowed its power to fill his spirit, to change his mind, his heart, his lifestyle and direction. Along with his son he was baptized by St. Ambrose and returned home to North Africa where he devoted himself to prayer and meditation. Eventually he became a priest then a bishop and then one of the greatest of the western fathers of the Church. It's an extraordinary example of the power of the word of God.

Our own St. Ignatius had a similar experience. When he was

recovering from a wound he had received in battle, he passed the time reading the only literature at hand, the lives of saints and the life of Christ. And he too through prayer and reflection on the words he read experienced a conversion that led him to found the Society of Jesus and become one of the great saints of our church.

The word of God is powerful. It can accomplish miracles. Just think of the first words of God that we read about in Scripture. In the first chapter of the Bible we read that God said, "Let there be light and light was made." God spoke and it happened. In our Gospels Jesus speaks healing words and the blind see, the lame walk, the dead rise and, perhaps most important of all, the poor have the Gospel preached to them

The image Jesus uses of a house built on rock becomes all the more significant in this day and age when cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes have caused so much damage and destruction in our world. Jesus is speaking in metaphors but wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be as secure in our spiritual lives as that house that is built on rock. It can happen of course. All we have to do is hear the words of Jesus and act on them. Act on them. Hearing is not enough.

In our country today that image of the house built on rock has taken on a new significance. So many people have lost their homes because of the financial crisis. Much of that is due to the greed of exploiters. Some of it is due to the carelessness of the buyers or perhaps their own greed at what they thought were great bargains. At any rate they found that their homes were built on sandy soil and they lost them. So they have a personal and vivid experience of what Jesus is saying.

We have every opportunity in the world to experience the kind of security Jesus talks about. We come here every Sunday where we hear the word of God and then in communion we receive the Word of God, the Son of God, Jesus who is present in the bread and wine that have become his body and blood. As we leave this church we must remember to take with us what we have become, hearers of the word, members of his Body, ready to continue in our world today the saving acts that he performed: feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming the stranger.

We are learning that some of those natural disasters I mentioned may be triggered by global warming which in turn is linked to the pollution of

the environment by human beings. If indeed this is the case then we are not acting according to the word of God. Remember how God in the Book of Genesis made Adam and Eve stewards of creation and told them to care for the world they lived in. That same word is addressed to us. Perhaps by hearing the words that Jesus speaks in the Gospels and acting on them we will in fact help to prevent some of the disasters that take so many lives and cause so much suffering. Maybe we will in fact be like the wise man who built his house on rock.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Every year we look for ways to remind ourselves of our need to respond to the word of God and in a special way to the word of Jesus who asks us to reform our lives. A good way to do this is by praying with the word of God, spending a little extra time reading Scripture and listening to what God might be saying to us. During this Lenten season here at Holy Trinity we are encouraging our parishioners to form or join a small prayer group to reflect together on the word of God and what that word might be calling us to. Consult the parish bulletin for more information. There's plenty of opportunity to experience the power of God's word and to make sure that our house is built on rock, the firm foundation of our relationship to God and to one another.