

## Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

January 17, 2016    Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Now that the Christmas/Epiphany season has concluded, and we find ourselves in what the Church calls "Ordinary Time" for just a few weeks until Lent begins on Ash Wednesday on February 10th, less than a month from now, we might think that there's not much going on---that everything is kind of "ordinary" in this snowy and frigid mid-winter time of the year. And yet, as we know, there is so much going on in our society and in the wider Church calendar that it's hard to keep up. Here's just some of the special/important events taking place all around us.

Aside from the NFL football playoff games taking place this weekend, today is a national holiday weekend as we commemorate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We pray in a special way today and tomorrow for an end of racial division and hatred, that all people will be treated with equality and justice, and we pray for our civic and religious leaders so that we can truly work together for the attainment of that "dream" of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and all of us who are dedicated to those same principles. We are also about to begin the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which begins tomorrow, Monday, January 18<sup>th</sup> and concludes next Monday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, the great Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. These are important days for us to pray for unity within the Body of Christ, the very prayer that was the closest to Jesus Himself, as He prayed to His Heavenly Father on the night before He died: "*Father, may they all be one!*". And these are special days to pray for protection and the dignity of all human life. A special nine-day Novena for Life began yesterday, January 16<sup>th</sup> and will conclude on Monday January 25<sup>th</sup>. In the midst of that Novena, on Friday of this week, we will be observing the 43rd anniversary of the tragic Supreme Court decision which has legalized abortion in our country. That day, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, is declared by the Church as a "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children," and I ask you to find your own special ways of keeping that day sacred. There will be special Masses celebrated in each Deanery on, or near, that day; here at the Cathedral on Friday, we will be celebrating Mass at 5:00 p.m., followed by a silent walk to Bronson Park for an ecumenical prayer service. If you can't make it to Mass, perhaps you can make it a day of prayer, a day of fast and abstinence, or a day when you make some particular sacrifice in partial atonement for the loss of the estimated nearly 60 million unborn babies who have been aborted over these 43 years.

So, even though we are in Ordinary Time, we have much to occupy our attention to pray and work for change, repentance, unity and a greater willingness to follow God and God's ways in our world, our society and in our individual lives.

Today's Scripture Readings for this Second Sunday in Ordinary Time remind us of what is most important to us at all times: that our God is with us, and that our God loves us unconditionally.

The First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah teaches us that God looks at us, His People--the people of generations ago and the people of our own generation---and says: "*You shall be called by a new name...you shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the Lord....No more shall people call you 'Forsaken', or your land 'Desolate', but you shall be called 'My Delight', and your land 'Espoused'. **For the Lord delights in you!** As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, **so shall your God rejoice in you.***"

And in our Gospel Reading today, we heard Jesus, after his mother urged Him to do so, choose to perform His first miracle at a wedding to save a young bride and groom from huge embarrassment by changing water into wine. And it wasn't just a bottle or two, or just enough to get them through the rest of the reception; it was an extravagant demonstration of God's gracious goodness by giving them enough wine for ten wedding receptions.

All of us are well aware that in our own day-in and day-out life experiences, there are times when we also "run out" of energy and spiritual resources; when we feel overwhelmed by stress and anxiety---overcome by problems and burdens---or unable to meet our responsibilities. But that is when we need to celebrate the fact that, in the midst of the difficulties of our daily lives, our God is here with us, assuring us of His Love for us, and reminding us: "*You shall be called 'my delight'....for the Lord delights in you.*"

What tremendous good news this is for each of us in the "ordinariness" of our lives: that when we, as a person of faith, come to Jesus----when we are willing (as Mary told the servants in today's Gospel) to "*do whatever He tells you*" to do----we will absolutely find the miraculous energy and change of heart to do whatever it is that we need to do.

That is the Good News of Jesus Christ! God loves us and lives in our ordinary, human, sinful world with us. He is not interested in condemnation; He focuses on reconciliation, mercy and salvation. God has come to be with us, and will never turn His back on us. He remains with us in the "ordinariness" of our lives, whether that's in the high points of the "wedding

receptions” of life, or in the low points of the social evils of our generation, human failing in general and our own personal sin.

Our Gospel shows us that in God’s Hands, ordinary water became delicious, fine wine. Here at this Mass, through the action of the priest, God’s Hands will transubstantiate ordinary bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ to be our spiritual food and drink! As long as we put our ordinary human lives into those amazing and miraculous hands of God---as long as we are willing to “do whatever He tells you”---we will also be amazed to see what we will become, and how we can reach out to make wonderful, life-changing things happen in the lives of our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley