

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

During a Sunday service, the pastor asked the congregation for their intentions. We heard the usual requests to pray for sick people and the acknowledgments for those who helped when a parishioner died. The somber mood was broken when the last intention was heard. A woman stood up and said, "My granddaughter turned 16 this week and received her driver's license. Let us pray for us all."

Dear Friends,

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July. This week we celebrate our blessings in this land. We celebrate the blessing and opportunity of freedom. But there would be nothing to celebrate if men and women in past generations did not get moving to work and fight for freedom. The founding fathers declared independence from Great Britain. There were a lot of sacrifices. Almost a century later, civil war brought damage to the country. Then it was ended, ensuring freedom for everyone. Ultimately, it all came to be for happiness and peace.

Dorothy Day, through the Catholic Worker Movement welcomed everyone, the hungry, the poor and the disheartened. When asked what she would do for them, she replied, "we are trying to make them happy."

The scriptures today seem to offer the same spirit. "They are trying to make everyone happy."

In the first reading, Isaiah sees joy in the fulfillment of God's promises. He praises Yahweh for removing trials and tribulations from Mother Jerusalem. After its pain, destruction and evil, Isaiah rejoices that its revitalization is near, and God's favor once again embraces his chosen people. Not only will the physical city be transformed, but the people themselves will be a new creation upon their return to Jerusalem.

In the Gospel Jesus sent his disciples for mission with some conditions and limitations. Joyful enthusiasm envelops the happy return of Jesus' disciples from their successful mission. They rejoiced as they witnessed the overthrow of powers of evil. Jesus points out to them to rejoice that they were assured a place in the kingdom of heaven than subjecting to the demons. St. Paul talks about his happiness relies on the cross of Jesus Christ. He will never boast for anything than this.

As we have freedom and celebrate it, it is a reminder for all of us constantly to be happy and peaceful; and make others happy and peaceful. Recent years, I think we lost our happiness as a nation due to various factors. Lot of people are away from God. We can see this in our own families. This is what happened in the people of Israel. They wanted

to be free from God, but then became slaves to so many other things. God brought them back, they resisted, and later they listened and came back. Once they were back, they were rejoicing. There was peace and prosperity in the nation. I personally think that we need to be closer to God to bring peace and unity. We need to pray harder and harder for our families to go to God. There will be a lot of resistance. But genuine prayers will never be unheard. Let there be peace on earth.

**For your personal Reading by John Shea, A theologian, poet, storyteller**

There once lived a peasant in Crete who deeply loved his life. He enjoyed tilling the soil, feeling the warm sun on his naked back as he worked the fields, and feeling the soil under his feet. He loved the planting, the harvesting, and the very smell of nature. He loved his wife and his family and his friends, and he enjoyed being with them, eating with them, drinking wine, talking, and making love. And he loved especially Crete, his tiny, beautiful country! The earth, the sky, the sea, it was his! This was his home.

One day he sensed that death was near. What he feared was not what lay beyond, for he knew God's goodness and had lived a good life. No, he feared leaving Crete, his wife, his children, his friends, his home, and his land. Thus, as he prepared to die, he grasped in his right hand a few grams of soil from his beloved Crete and he told his loved ones to bury him with it.

He died, awoke, and found himself at heaven's gates, the soil still in his hand, and heaven's gate firmly barred against him. Eventually St. Peter emerged through the gates and spoke to him: "you've lived a good life, and we've a place for you inside, but you cannot enter unless you drop that handful of soil. You cannot enter as you are now!"

The man was reluctant to drop the soil and protested: "Why? Why must I let go of this soil? Indeed, I cannot! What's inside of those gates, I have no knowledge of. But this soil, I know, ... it's my life, my work, my wife, and kids, it's what I know and love, it's Crete! Why should I let it go for something I know nothing about?"

Peter answered: "When you get to heaven you will know why. It's too difficult to explain. I am asking you to trust, trust that God can give you something better than a few grains of soil."

But the man refused. In the end, silent and seemingly defeated, Peter left him, closing the large gates behind. Several minutes later, the gates opened a second time and this time, from them, emerged a young child. She did not try to coax the man into letting go of the soil in his hand. She simply took his hand and, as she did, it opened and the soil of Crete spilled to the ground. She then led him through the gates.

A shock awaited him as he entered heaven ... there, before him, lay all of Crete!