

9th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle A)

June 1, 2008 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

Back when I was a Second Class Petty Officer in the World's Largest Navy – back in the olden days, when we had wooden ships and iron men – we used to wear these things [dog tags] around our necks. Most people call them “dog tags.” Their purpose was to show who you were, and who you belonged to. It doesn't actually say “Property of the United States Government” on them, but there were times when we thought it should.

When I was a kid, the dictionary had pictures to illustrate some of the words . . .

Wait a minute, where's he going with this? I thought we were talking about dog tags?

Anyway, the dictionary had pictures. Strangely enough, one of the ones I remember was “phylacteries.” It had a picture of a man with a beard, with little square things strapped to his head and arm, with little thin straps wrapped round and round. That's what today's first reading refers to – phylacteries. A phylactery was a little box containing a verse of Scripture. In the reading, Moses told the people,

“Take these words of mine into your heart and soul.
Bind them at your wrist as a sign,
and let them be a pendant on your forehead.

So, the Israelites wore them to show who they were and who they belonged to. Sort of like dog tags.

MOVE

A lot of people wear a crucifix, or a cross, or a religious medal around their necks. Some people wear the Brown Scapular. Probably many of you do that. If you think about it, all those things serve sort of the same purpose as my Navy dog tags did – to show who you are, and who you belong to.

But hang on a second. Who are we, and who do we belong to, really? You know, I **did** say they were “to show who you were, and who you belonged to.” But is it just to show others? If the only purpose is to show **others**, then it may not mean much. In a way, maybe those things are really to remind **ourselves** of who we are, and who we belong to. Maybe sometimes we need to be reminded of that.

So, is the cross just a piece of jewelry, or does it show who we really belong to, who we really are? That’s sort of what Jesus was talking about in today’s Gospel . . .

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

Thinking about that might make us a little uncomfortable. Most of us were socialized in school, conditioned to follow the rules and stay out of trouble and everything would be all right. A blessing if you follow the commandments, a curse if you don’t. But life is not that simple. Just wearing a phylactery with a verse of Scripture inside, or wearing a cross, is not the same thing as truly living by the Scripture, doing the will of the Father. If we wear a cross but ignore the way of life to which Jesus calls us, it’s kind of like just saying “Lord, Lord” and letting it go at that.

MOVE

There's a story about a sailor who was washed overboard in a storm in the middle of the night. He couldn't swim. He thrashed around in the water, thinking he would surely drown in the darkness. You can only imagine how frightened he must have been. As he struggled to stay afloat, he felt something solid about a foot below the surface of the water. He grabbed on to it . . . and even though the sea was churning around him, he managed to hang on.

When dawn finally came – and the tide had gone out – he realized that he was holding onto a rock just a short distance from the shore. A boat came and rescued him. They asked him, "Didn't you shake with fear when you were hanging on that rock."

"Yes," he replied, "but the rock didn't."

Sometimes, you and I are like that sailor – tossed about on a dark and stormy sea. Our one hope is reaching out for that rock – and holding tight when we find it. Morning will arrive sooner or later.

MOVE

In today's responsorial psalm we prayed, "Be my rock." Then in the Gospel, Jesus said "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock."

We sang in the psalm, and we sing again – “Jesus, be my rock.” Give me the grace to live according to your Word.

Jesus, be my rock. (Say it with me – Jesus, be my rock.)

Most of us have been tossed around enough to know that there is no lasting security in this world. Oh, we keep thinking that maybe something, some one, will finally come along and give us what we need. If I can just make a little bit more money, everything will be all right. If I can just get the kids through school, everything will be all right. If I can just get the boat paid off, everything will be all right. If I can just get through another couple of weeks, I’ll be on vacation, and everything will be all right.

But all that stuff is trivial. It all depends on your perspective.

MOVE

One of my friends was diagnosed with breast cancer last week. Stage 4. Maybe a year. That’s all they can tell her. That’s it. I remember when Cardinal Bernardin was diagnosed with cancer some years ago – his reaction was, “Well, . . . this changes everything.”

No amount of money can really provide lasting security. There is only one who can do that.

Jesus, be my rock. (Say it with me – Jesus, be my rock.)

St. Paul talks today about the false security of legalism – that if I just follow the rules, everything will be all right. But that’s not the way it is. We are not saved by following the rules. God does not love us because we are lovable. God loves us because of his Son.

Jesus, be my rock. (Say it with me – Jesus, be my rock.)

Not many people ever did more for the poor than Mother Teresa. But she knew that works could never save her. During her dark night, she clung to the only one who could save her. Jesus was her rock.

Jesus, be my rock. (Say it with me – Jesus, be my rock.)

As we worship today, we ask for grace to live according to his word. We pray that his word will touch every element of our lives.

Jesus, be my rock.

Reading 1

Dt 11:18, 26-28, 32

Moses told the people,
“Take these words of mine into your heart and soul.
Bind them at your wrist as a sign,
and let them be a pendant on your forehead.

“I set before you here, this day, a blessing and a curse:
a blessing for obeying the commandments of the LORD, your God,
which I enjoin on you today;
a curse if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD, your God,
but turn aside from the way I ordain for you today,
to follow other gods, whom you have not known.”

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 31:2-3, 3-4, 17, 25

R. (3b) Lord, be my rock of safety.

In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your justice rescue me,
incline your ear to me,
make haste to deliver me!

R. Lord, be my rock of safety.

Be my rock of refuge,
a stronghold to give me safety.
You are my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake you will lead and guide me.

R. Lord, be my rock of safety.

Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your kindness.
Take courage and be stouthearted,
all you who hope in the LORD.
R. Lord, be my rock of safety.

Reading II

Rom 3:21-25, 28

Brothers and sisters,
Now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,
though testified to by the law and the prophets,
the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ
for all who believe.
For there is no distinction;
all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.
They are justified freely by his grace
through the redemption in Christ Jesus,
whom God set forth as an expiation,
through faith, by his blood.
For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Gospel

Mt 7:21-27

Jesus said to his disciples:
“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’
will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.
Many will say to me on that day,
‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?
Did we not drive out demons in your name?
Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’
Then I will declare to them solemnly,
‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.
The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.
But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.
And everyone who listens to these words of mine
but does not act on them
will be like a fool who built his house on sand.
The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.
And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”