



Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Sept. 1, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

†God be in my mind, †on my lips and †in my heart. Amen.

Some of us have been doing this for years while others of us may have observed the practice and wondered “why”. I began my message and our reflection together with the ancient practice of signing the forehead, the lips and the heart. That practice happens at the proclamation of the Gospel in the midst of those assembled for worship. The deacon or priest, sometimes called the *Gospeler*, signs the Gospel Book which contains the Word of God with a cross. Then, he or she signs the forehead, lips and chest to represent the heart.

For those of you who are new to the Episcopal Tradition or visiting with us for the first time, you will notice that we make the †Sign of the Cross quite often in worship. We begin worship and end worship with the Sign of the Cross.

Making the Sign of the Cross is a reminder that it is in and through the Cross of Jesus that we have been given the promise of eternal life. It is that same Sign of the Cross with which we are baptized into the Christian Tradition. So, it is appropriate when passing the font either at the entrance of the Church or the font here at the Crossing to dip fingers into the blessed water to recall Baptism with the †Sign of the Cross.

Jesus gave his life on the cross, the ultimate act of humility and self-sacrifice for our salvation. It is through the Cross of Jesus that his resurrection and our salvation were made possible. Every Sunday throughout the liturgical year, we recall Resurrection of Jesus on Easter.

Some of us gather Sunday after Sunday and some of us come as often as possible. We come for various reasons. We give of our time on Sunday mornings to give God thanks and praise.

We come to offer ourselves and our time to be refreshed and renewed. We call this ‘part’ of the spiritual life, the living out of our commitment to God who is committed to us. The journey of the spiritual life can be beautiful and at times, not always easy. It calls us to a ‘God consciousness’ that, if realized, embraced and lived can link us to God in an instant.

A week ago Friday, I drove from here to Petoskey for the first time. Earlier in the week, two different people mentioned the Tunnel of Trees and Cross Valley, both beyond Petoskey and Harbor Springs.

I arrived in Petoskey, checked in to the Days Inn and got back into my car. I drove to beautiful Harbor Springs and continued the tree-lined journey that was just lovely. Late afternoon sun shone through the trees to illuminate the narrow windy road, as light cascaded through the trees. The road is very narrow with relatively sharp curves.

The drive reminded me of the spiritual journey of life. God calls us and accompanies us down the road of life, a road which can sometimes feel narrow with sharp curves. Sometimes the light is quite apparent. Sometimes, the light is diffused through this or that challenge. At other times, the light may seem altogether not present.

On one level, all three of today's readings tell us something important about the spiritual life. They point to the virtue of humility.

From the Book of Ecclesiasticus or Sirach as it is also known, we hear a passage that deals with 'pride'. Is not humility the opposite of what the writer calls, "pride"?

The writer of Hebrews reminds us: "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" The passage is couched in an important aspect of the spiritual life and that is, humility. The Letter goes on to remind us to "not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." (Hebrews 1:15-16) St. Mark's Stewardship Ministry might long for this passage from Hebrews during the stewardship season soon to be upon us. We depend on the giving of ourselves and our financial resources to "do good" here at St. Mark's.

The parable in the Gospel of Luke teach us about humility as seen through the lens of a banquet. It calls on those invited to 'not' take a seat at the head table. It is a fascinating parable which teaches us about humility. It has much to do with sacrificing one's own needs or perceived needs for the sake of others.

In the Episcopal Tradition, we are called to be committed to God in Jesus. We are called to worship as often as possible and to receive Holy Communion. We are called to give of ourselves, our time, gifts and financial resources.

These days, I believe it is more and more apparent that we live in a world where giving of one's self is overshadowed by pride, self-indulgence and self-centeredness. Humility is not in vogue at least for some people. As followers of Jesus, we are called to a different standard.

The Prophet Micah seems to sum up much of what we are called to embrace in the spiritual life. "Act justly. Love mercy and walk humbly with God". (Micah 6:8) Micah calls us to be committed to God who is just, loving and merciful. Being humble before God opens the door to being molded and shaped as a follower of Jesus. If one is humble before God, then, one is much more disposed to act with justice and to be merciful for the sake of others. I believe we are here this morning because we want to walk through that door. We long to do those things which unite us to Jesus and one another.

We long for justice for the oppressed and the release of captives especially those along our southern borders. We long for mercy for those imprisoned unjustly. We long for comfort for those struggling with mental illness and those who find themselves in abusive relationships. We long to walk alongside Jesus with humility and to experience a deep consciousness of being one with God.

On this Labor Day weekend, thank you for being here on your spiritual journey to celebrate life with Jesus and others. Thank you for sacrificing part of your weekend to be here today, for "Such sacrifices are pleasing to God". (Hebrews 13:16) Such sacrifices enable us to be one with God and with one another. Amen.