

**June 17, 2018**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Like many of you, I am thinking of my late father this Father's Day weekend. I shared with you before that my dad was a logger in Whatcom County and so the reading from the Prophet Ezekiel struck me, the Lord God taking the topmost branch of the cedar, a tender shoot and place it on a lofty mountain. The prophet says that this tender shoot will become a majestic cedar. Cedar trees are truly majestic. The Cedar tree endures; it is the slowest growing of the trees in the Northwest and when the cedar falls it remains solid for a long time before it rots. I remember when I worked for my dad and uncles in the woods that the cedar was the most fragrant of the trees, freshly cut, it has a sweet smell. Cedar makes for the best kindling for starting fires and is the strongest wood for buildings.

What does the tender shoot the majestic cedar in Ezekiel mean in the context of the Bible, in the message of salvation history? If we understand that everything in the Bible is about Jesus, then the tender shoot symbolizes Jesus when he was born as a tender baby, one of us. He was born to be the tender shoot of God's mercy and love. The majestic cedar, the most enduring and fragrant of trees, is like the everlasting evening sacrifice that Jesus offers on the cross and like incense, rises up to God. The odor of Death usually is not pleasant. Jesus's death on the cross has a sweet odor, like the freshly fallen cedar, because his death transforms all human suffering and death into new life.

Think of the sweet smelling offering of Jesus makes on the cross whenever you read the Gospel of Mark. Mark's Gospel, more than any other Gospel, views everything Jesus does through the lens of the cross. Every miracle, every healing, every parable has something to do with the cross. Without the cross, Jesus is just another wonderworker and great orator. Without the cross, there is no resurrection, without the cross and resurrection, there is no salvation. Without the cross we are still dead in our sin, death still holds us captive and suffering has no meaning.

On the surface, the cross was nothing more than punishment for a crazy man who was thought be a threat to the religious and political well-being of the time; he went against the flow and was willing to suffer and even die so that we might live.

Last week our Catholic Bishops meet for several days as they do every year in the month of June. They spoke up against recent decisions against refugees and immigrants to our country, making strong statements in favor of the dignity of the human person and the protection of life. First, they spoke in favor of protecting our long established system of offering asylum for women who are escaping life-threatening situations of domestic abuse in their country of origin. They called it a protection to the right to life. The Bishop's Committee on Migration condemned the continued use of family separation at the US-Mexican border to implement the zero tolerance policy of illegal entry to this country. They went on to say that while they support the need to protect our borders, there are other ways to do so. "The separation of babies from their mothers is not the answer and is immoral." That statement raises the tender shoot of human life up high on the majestic cedar of Jesus Christ as our hope for new life.

What does that mean for us? Everyone has their own political perspective, which is natural. Yet, how do we form our perspective, or more importantly our conscience? One evangelical preacher said that in this age of great political divide, it is if every American has given a red shirt or a blue shirt, and without much reflection, people of faith will begin by looking through the lens of being red or blue, Republican or Democrat. He said, "We need a third way." The third way is Jesus. Christians engage with politics because we seek to live what Jesus taught, to love God and neighbor. The first question we ask is, what role does my faith play in forming what I believe about the protection of human life? About abortion and euthanasia, yes, *and* every stage of life from its natural beginning to its natural end and everything in between.

The way we think will shape how we act. The way we act is how we live out our faith. Our actions of love are the smallest of seeds that will grow into largest of bushes where the most vulnerable will find rest in their branches.