

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
March 2-3, 2019

All Saints Parish, Syr., NY
Sr. Maureen D'onofrio CSJ

Here we are again – another year of preparing for our Lenten journey beginning with Ash Wednesday this week!

We heard proclaimed this morning in the Book of Sirach how the fruit of a tree shows the care it has been given and then Luke comes along in our Gospel reading and reminds us that every tree is known by its fruit. But today I'm going to share about another kind of tree – a tree that cheers us on as a sign of HOPE all year long, especially in the winter. John Shea, a well-known spiritual and story-teller writer tells the following story: “When God was making the trees, God gave a gift to each species. But first God set up a contest to determine which gift would be most useful to whom. God said to the trees, 'I want you to stay awake and keep watch over the earth for 7 nights. The trees were excited about this and so the first night wasn't difficult to stay awake, but the second night wasn't so easy and just before dawn, a few of the trees fell asleep. On the 3rd night they whispered among themselves to stay awake but a few more dropped off to sleep and the same for the following nights so that by the time the 7th night arrived, the only trees still awake were the pine, the cedar, and the spruce. God looked at this little group of trees and said, 'What wonderful endurance you have! You will be given the gift of remaining green forever. You will be the guardians of the forest. Even in the dead of winter, your sister and brother trees will find life protected in your branches.' Ever since then, other trees and plants shed their leaves in the winter, but the evergreens remain just that - green.”

John Shea's story illustrates a wonderful Lenten theme: greenness in the midst of barrenness and fidelity to our Creator. In the evergreen trees we find a note of gentle but resolute defiance. The surrounding world may seem barren but they continue to bear witness – they represent the faithful, the loyal, the constant. Hopefully, we won't be like those trees that fell asleep and were not open to the presence of the grace of God in their lives.

How many of us have been inspired by the evergreen trees on their way to the Adirondack Mts.- their branches seem to be reaching up to the sky praising God – a moment of awe! When you think of it, those of us who have the real Christmas tree - the aromatic Christmas tree brings hope and joy into our homes during the holidays. The evergreen tree is also a teacher, it provides us with wonderful lessons for life. Its branches are separate from each other so when the heavy snow comes the snow falls off its branches preventing them from breaking, teaching us that sometimes in life we have to bend. Barbra Streisand in her CD named WALLS sings of how “some trees learn to

bend, that's how they survive, maybe we must learn from them to keep our hearts alive.” Life can be like that when we are weighed down but the grace of God keeps us from becoming broken people throughout our walk of life.

The limbs of the evergreen are shaped so that the wind can blow through them preventing them, most often, from toppling over. There are times in our lives when we experience the winds of pain, sorrow, sickness, loneliness, fear and the list goes on. These can be dark days in our lives where there seems to be no relief, where we're inundated with fear and violence all around us; a lack of hope for the well-being of our earth; and all the “isms” that we talk about here at All Saints, but we will not be bogged down by what surrounds us. And we, who believe in God's grace - that generous, energizing movement of the God within each of us - that's the sunlight of God's love that will fill us with the HOPE for a brighter tomorrow. As I shared with you at another time, the letters: H-O-P-E stand for Hang On Possibilities Everywhere.

The evergreens also model what our role as a Christian should be. We are called to be followers of Christ – to bear witness to peace in a time of conflict; to love in the midst of indifference; and to hope in the midst of despair. I think we all know that the way to witness peace is to start with ourselves before we can live in peace with others... as the song says: “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

The way to love is to act lovingly towards others, especially the people that we find difficult to love, as Fr. Fred always prays in our Eucharistic prayer during Mass, and we know that is not easy!

So as we prepare to enter into our Lenten season, remember how last week Peter Daino invited us to slow down, maybe take more time for quiet in our lives. We do violence to ourselves if there's no quiet in our lives!

So I now invite you to sit up straight in the pew, feet flat on the floor, close your eyes and blot out all the beautiful people sitting around you, and let us ponder how we can model ourselves after the evergreen tree and bear witness as a faithful, loyal and constant follower of Christ.

Amen!