

Sermon for the Feast of St. Mark the Evangelist April 25th

Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians - “And he gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost
AMEN.

In our opening collect today we prayed for *GRACE not to be like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, that we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel.*

If we are called to be unified in faith?

If we are called to have the same knowledge of the Son of God?

If we are fully understand the stature of the fulness of Christ?

Why do we stand so divided?

The word stature in the dictionary is defined by *importance or reputation gained by ability or achievement*.

On April 23 at 5:49 am the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket successfully launched 4 men into orbit. I got up at 5:00 am and drove to north Merritt Island and stood in an open field all alone and watched this magnificent event.

The morning sun had not quite yet made its way over the horizon. The evening stars were offering their last twinkles of the night. And the roosters were making their morning call to the new day.

I stood with anticipation to watch an event I had never seen before. Like a child waiting upon the arrival of a holiday tradition or singing of Happy Birthday I stood waiting!

Out of the stillness of the night a rumbling occurred and the sky began to light up. A brilliance like nothing I had ever seen before took over the sky. Like magic the night became day. Louder and louder became the rumbling as the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket as it made its way into the heavens.

Before long the rocket was out of sight and the sky took on a new persona. The boosters had been released from the rocket and started to make their way back to earth. Like a beacon of light in the sky they lit the darkness of the night with a new light as they slowly returned. Absolutely stunning, a beautiful display of what man is capable of.

As the night returned to its darkness and the thrill of the event faded away I gave thought to the collect and what St. Paul wrote. I said to myself, adults are nothing more than big kids waiting for the next surprise, big event or new doctrine leading them to believe in something that someone else did or said. Especially if we read it on the Internet, it has to be true!

Now don't take me wrong, the successful launch of SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket is historic and was incredible to watch. However, three weeks ago the Christian Church remembered a more historic and incredible event! An event that should have unified us, allowing us to have the same knowledge, and a full understanding of the stature of the fullness of Christ. However, instead Christians stand divided by denominations, jurisdictions, buildings, and even amongst the people within our own parishes.

How is that possible?

Didn't St. Paul write to the Ephesians - GRACE was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ***(What was His gift, LOVE!)***

He went on to say that, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants/ children, tossed by waves and swept away...rather living the truth in love we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together.

Earlier chapter 4 to the Ephesians St. Paul wrote *we with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, (the gift that was given to us through Jesus Christ) striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace; one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Jesus made it clear in Gospel of St. John today, *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. As the Father loves me, So I also love you.*

Here is the thing when we don't love Jesus is the same thing that happens to the branches that do not bear fruit. Jesus said, *"Any one who does not remain in me, will be thrown out like the branch and wither will be thrown into the fire."*

Earlier I asked two questions;

Why do we stand so divided?

How is this possible?

We can trust humanity to launch 4 men into space going more than 1500 miles and hour but we can't seem to hold on to and/or continue to believe that God sent His Son into the world to give us everlasting life.

We can't seem to comprehend what happens to those who don't produce fruit and like a branch that withers and dries up will one day be cast away.

Later in the day of the rocket launch I was at a job where I was called to help prune the bushes and plants of the customer. At first glance I couldn't see the withered and dried flowers or the branches that stopped producing flowers. But as I began look more closely I found one dead flower after another and before I knew it my bucket was full. Without the proper pinching and pruning these bushes would stop producing beautiful flowers.

What a blessing it was for me to see how God had opened up to me the power of His Word through the events of the world and a flowering bush.

There is nothing wrong in being awe of the night sky lighting up from the burners of a rocket launching 4 men into space. However we need to take heed to the truth of what was in our opening collect - ***where we prayed for GRACE not to be like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, that we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel.***

We need to stop dividing ourselves and focusing on all things that don't lead us to the unity that St. Paul called for. We are called to stop believing in false doctrine, looking for the perfect building or seeking a parish that is nothing more than a home for saints and not a hospital for the sick. More than anything we need to fully understand stature of the fulness of Christ. That He is the "true vine". Remember what the dictionary said about stature - The word is defined by importance or reputation gained by ability or achievement.

Do we see sending four men into the heavens more important or a higher achievement than what Christ did for us? Or can we look towards our Lord knowing He has opened the gates of heaven to all who believe and put their trust in Him?

You see I believe the words of Saint Paul when he said, *some were given some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. **There we will find the one and true Church.***

If we believe we have been blessed with gifts and the greatest of them is Love we should use our gifts to feed and nurture the vine. When we do and allow our vines to be pruned we will experience the GRACE of Jesus when said, *If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you...these things I have spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.*

Let's experience that joy together as one body!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost.
AMEN