

Homily by Fr. Paul Jones

## Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 27, 2010

For the two weeks before coming to the monastery last Monday (June 21), I was out of state in Colorado. I was at the foot of the 13,000-foot Mt. Sopris; framed by Chair Mountain at the headwaters of the Crystal River Valley. It was glorious. There were warm days, frosty nights and after one day of rain, we awoke to find that snow adorned Mt. Sopris with a glistening white wedding dress.

Yet this was not a vacation. We were at the old family cabin that we had built 40 years ago. It had mistakenly been rented to strangers who trashed and tore it up. It was boarded up, old, rot had taken its toll, and mice reigned inside-rent free. My daughters and I became determined to restore the cabin so that they and their children could experience what my children and I had so wonderfully experienced each summer while they were growing up.

I love my daughters deeply and that is what made these two weeks so delightful. We spent 12-hour days tearing out insulation, walls, joists and roofing. Then we put it all back together. It was very hard work but we were together for one more time. One more delightful and beautiful time.

Yet it was lonely. I felt a certain amount of sadness as I left early in the mornings and later in the evenings. I left the campfire each day to find a quiet place to read the Breviary for Daily Offices. It was lonely when I would find a rock away from camp to celebrate Mass, with Mt. Sopris as my Deacon.

My daughters are not hostile to my Christian practices. Not at all. They are tolerant and even supportive, "If it is meaningful to you, Pops, more power to you." However, it is no longer meaningful to them. Not any longer.

My children were raised in the Methodist Church. We attended church and Sunday School, Youth Group, and Vacation Bible School. I baptized my grandchildren as Catholics with my own hands. However, no one in my family is a practicing Christian-no one.

Therefore, for those two weeks my time with God had a little sadness at the edges.

This feeling remained as I read today's scripture in preparation for my homily this week. Elijah had the sad task of anointing Elisha to succeed him. It is hard to step aside and be replaced. It is

like a pitcher seeing someone in the bullpen warming up to take his place. So it is with daughters; they increase as I decrease and step aside as a central person in their lives. For them, the Psalm refrain says it well, "You are my inheritance."

This is what Paul says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free." I knew then that this homily would be for my daughters, although they will not hear it-you can listen in.

For my daughters religion feels like bondage, not freedom. They feel that they are being saddled with countless "do and don'ts", and that there is an incredible number of things to believe and countless numbers that they dare not to believe. They look in my library and see a three-inch thick volume of Canon Law, 1000 pages of the Catechism, 4 volumes of the Breviary. There are 27 volumes of Bible Commentaries in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The list goes on endlessly. The girls think that it is just too much to take in.

In the face of all of this, what I would want my daughters to understand is what Paul repeats, "You are called to freedom, my sisters and brothers." He then goes on to explain freedom in seven very simple words. This is what he says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. You shall love you neighbor as yourself." Simple words and that is freedom.

My dear daughters, it is all about love. Once around the campfire, one of you said, "No matter what, Dad, we always knew that you loved us, without conditions and that nothing could remove that love." The name for that is "grace," the gift of being able to love because you are loved. Is that so complicated, so hard to understand? You do not earn it; you cannot; it is a sheer gift-to be embraced with thanks. Another of you said that I always made each of you feel so special. I do not do that as well as I would like to, but God does. That is what God is all about; the One Who writes our names on the palm of His hand, Who numbers the hairs on our heads, and Who died for us out of love. Love of this depth has a name-it is Jesus.

Is this so complicated? "To love and be loved:" the Trinity, Mary, Purgatory, the Saints-all these extra things are simply a way of explicating the deepness of God's love!

Do perhaps some day there will come a moment when the beautiful lives that you are living can take one more step: to name the name.

This would mean recognizing that the love you have all known as a family is a clue to the meaning of the whole cosmos, all of history, and every speck of space and time. "It is all about love."

Kathy, Amy, Wendy, Suzanne, Elise-trust me: love is what it truly means to be free.