

ORDINARY SUNDAY IV “A”

JANUARY 29/30, 2011—ANOINTING OF THE SICK

This weekend as part of our celebration of the Eucharist we celebrate the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In the “General Introduction” to the rite of anointing the church reminds us that “suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people; yet their faith helps them to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering and to bear their pain with greater courage.” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick, #1*)

St. Paul in the selection from his first letter to the Corinthians urges his readers to adopt an attitude and lifestyle of meekness and humility. The prophet Zephaniah in the first reading and Jesus as he delivers the “Beatitudes” in the gospel both hinge their teaching on the virtues of humility, meekness. Such a challenge goes directly against conventional wisdom and practice that “might makes right”. Have any of us, for example, ever heard of a professional sports team choosing a lamb as a mascot? Who would want to play or be a fan of such a team? Today’s celebration in which we reach out to those among us rendered weak due to illness or age can be a segue to understanding and living a “Beatitude” centered life of meekness and humility.

Illness and suffering, if we allow them, can be a door to meekness and humility. Serious or chronic illnesses, even after availing ourselves of the most advanced medical treatments, are reminders of our creatureliness, our limitedness. We can either choose to be bitter about our lot, or use it to open ourselves to God. This is the way of meekness and humility. In embracing our lives in their totality with its potential and its limitations, its joys and its pains as a gift opening ourselves to God we encounter Jesus who chose to “empty” himself, assumed the fullness of our humanity including suffering and death and, through them raised us, to quote St. Paul, so that we could become rich, rich in God’s divine life. In my years as a priest I have often heard a sick person tell me, “Father while I would not have chosen my suffering I have come

through it to know God and his love for me in a way I didn't before. It has helped me to be grateful for the gifts I've been given and to sort out what is truly valuable." "Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth."