

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I was a kid, one of our family activities was to sit down together and listen to a phonograph album of music or comedy. On the Thursday night before Thanksgiving when I was in fifth grade we selected an album called *The First Family* by a comedian named Vaughn Meader. He and actress Naomi Brossart offered a good-natured parody of life at the White House in Washington DC with the president and the first lady. As kids, we didn't understand all the political humor, but that album had become a symbol of our family values including togetherness, patriotism, and laughter. The next day I went to our local Catholic school, and in the early afternoon, the principal suddenly pulled our teacher out of the classroom. Several minutes later they both reentered clearly disturbed. The principal told us terrible news about our president. At the age of 10, I didn't understand everything that was going on, but several of the girls in my class were already weeping uncontrollably that John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the first Catholic president of the United States of America, had just been shot dead.

We commemorate the 50th anniversary of that tragedy this week. Meanwhile, over in the Philippines, people are recovering after a typhoon brought devastation to homes and property, killing thousands of people and spreading disease that could claim even more lives.

The sad events that change the shape of history often cause people to wonder where is God. But God intentionally created human beings with a free will, and God created nature with cycles of death and rebirth. In times of tragedy, it is tempting to focus on the bad choices people make or the destructive powers of nature, rather than on the nobility of freedom and the wonder of creation. In the midst of chaos, it may appear that God has lost control, but God created a world with these possibilities to help us appreciate love, beauty, and redemption.

Psalms 98 says "The Lord comes to rule the world with justice." It envisions that creation is actively acclaiming the lordship of God. The sea and what fills it resound, as do the world and those who dwell in it. The rivers clap their hands, and even the mountains shout for joy.

We too praise God with our lips whenever we come to church, with our hands whenever we help our neighbor, and with our heart whenever we love others as we love ourselves. Yet sometimes we are not our best self. We use our lips, our hands and our heart to choose what is wrong. Sometimes the natural world that normally gives praise to God creates destruction. Sometimes we who normally praise God create evil. As we draw near the end of the church year, we yearn for Christ who will come as our judge. We believe that he will rule the earth with justice, restoring order where there is chaos, and grace where there is sin.