

## **Week 21 – Ordinary Time – August 22, 2010**

My nephew Danny recently announced his engagement. His two sisters married young men from Kansas City and St. Louis. But his two older brothers found their spouses elsewhere. Jeff's wife Marta is from Barcelona, Spain, where they now live with their two children. Bryan's wife Maria is from Sofia, Bulgaria, and they live in Strasbourg, France, with their new daughter. The youngest member of that family, Jon, is dating the younger sister of Maria from Bulgaria. So we weren't terribly surprised when Danny fell in love with a woman from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Now, just to put this in perspective, my generation, all 6 of us, live in the Kansas City area. My mother is in a nursing home in south Kansas City, and I live farther away from her than any of her other 5 children. We all live in several different counties. But my brother Mike's 6 children live in several different countries.

We love all these people, and we yearn to be together. Today, of course, you can be in touch electronically. You can video conference from your computer and you can communicate with family and friends through social networking websites. Here in the parish our youth group now has a page on Facebook. And any of you can sign up for a daily tweet from our parish office, giving you the latest news. Even though we may be physically separated from people we care about, we can still share their lives every day.

Not so in the time of Isaiah the prophet. Today's first reading comes from the very last chapter of an entire book that deals with separation. Many of the faithful Israelites had been driven away from Jerusalem and had gone into faraway cities located in modern day Spain, Turkey, and Libya. They were forced to split up. When they said goodbye, families broke up, businesses folded, and leadership toppled. But the Book of Isaiah holds a unique view of these fugitives. The Lord said, "I will send fugitives to the nations." In God's mind, they didn't really flee; they were sent to other peoples. God had a purpose for them. Today's prophecy continues, "they shall proclaim my glory among the nations." Then, the Lord predicts a reunion, a physical one, not a virtual one: "They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord. . . . to Jerusalem, my holy mountain." When loved ones move somewhere else, we often feel it as our loss, but it could also be God's gain. God may be sending them someplace where the values they have learned here will make a difference over there. Still, it is always hard to see them go.

When we are separated from the people we love through college, marriage, prison, or war, we have many ways of keeping in touch, but nothing matches physical presence. In some ways, electronic communication is just another way of expressing our yearning to be in the presence of others. As Christians, we believe that Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled in another, deeper way. Death will separate us from one another, but we believe that God will gather all his faithful people to the new and eternal Jerusalem, his holy mountain, where we shall proclaim

his glory forever. From God's perspective, this is our exile. Heaven is our home. Ultimately, that is the meaning of all our yearning: to be in the presence of God.