

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–2017

With all that has been happening concerning Hurricane Harvey and its devastation, I couldn't help but think of another Harvey, the famous broadcaster Paul Harvey. I remember a story he told on of his programs years ago. He told the true story of a man named Ray Blackstone. One summer morning as Raymond was preparing his breakfast after a heavy rain storm, he looked out the window and saw something that made his heart nearly stop. A small girl had fallen into a rain-flooded drainage ditch beside his home and was rapidly being swept downstream. Ray knew that not far away the drainage ditch disappeared beneath the road and then emptied into the main culvert. If he didn't reach her in time, she would drown.

He ran out the door and raced along the ditch, trying to get ahead of the child who was floundering in the water. Then he jumped into the rapidly moving stream, grabbed the child's arm and fought to hold on. Within about three feet of the culvert, his free hand was able to grab on to a rock. He clung desperately to both the child and the rock and tried to at the same time to pull themselves out of the water. By the time the rescuers arrived, he had pulled the girl to safety. Both were treated for shock but the little girl was spared.

At an award ceremony which followed a few months later, Raymond was awarded the Coast Guard's Silver Lifesaving Medal. Paul Harvey's comment before he gave his usual *Good Day!* was "The award is fitting, for this selfless person put himself at a great risk to himself more than people knew because...Ray Blackstone didn't know how to swim."

I'm sure we have all been watching TV and all that has been happening and continues to happen down in Texas and now to other areas. The stories of heroic rescues and helping others, like Ray Blackstone are many. So many people have been selfless in their actions and attempts to save, help, comfort and just be there for so many victims. I'm sure there are and will be many unsung heroes.

You might say that part of our calling as disciples of Jesus is a call to be a hero; perhaps not in the same way as Ray Blackstone, but nonetheless, in such a way that each of us individually and together, are called to go beyond our comfort zones to make a positive impact in the lives of others. A few weeks ago, we saw Jesus call out to Peter to leave the boat and go to him. Today, Jesus calls us out of our boats and with him, his grace and together, we will be able to bring hope, strength, optimism and a real sense of belonging to those, who for whatever reason or circumstance finds themselves on the fringe.

Sad to say, many people claim to be disciples of Jesus, but there is absolutely nothing in

their lives that would signify this except, perhaps, they go to church, they pray their devotions, they say their morning and evening prayers, but they forget that they are Church. They do not share their faith nor their possessions with others. They don't volunteer their time, talents or treasure.

In the Gospel today Jesus is very clear about what it takes to be his disciples. He never said it would be easy if we want to do it right. To follow him means to follow his example of selflessness when it comes to others. And we don't have look far or do research about how we can help and care for others. Those of you who are parents know that to be good parents means to have a selfless and patient attitude when it comes to your children. The same for all who care for those who can't take care of themselves. It's another way of doing what Jesus says when he says that we must deny ourselves and take up our cross.

Again, to do it right and be faithful to our calling is a cross and sometimes that cross is heavy, cumbersome and irritating. But, it is also life giving. That is what Jesus means when he says that those who lose their lives for his sake, that is, those who are selfless, they are the ones who will be able to live life to the full. It might seem contrary or opposite, but, the more we share ourselves and what we have with others, the more we will receive. That is what allows those whom we consider heroes to keep going and not think about themselves. That is what inspires, motivates and fulfills those who are loving, kind and generous. They never run out of that loving energy because, at the same time they are sharing with others, they are receiving from them. True love never runs out or is exhausted.

This is our calling. This is the kind of hero Christ is calling you and me to be. The world doesn't revolve around us. Our first priority is to Jesus and his kingdom. We know that means more than simply keeping the commandments and not sinning. Just not sinning is not going to get us into heaven. We need to leave the world a better place because we've been here. It means, in short, denying ourselves and following Jesus who gave his life for us and for the entire world. Let us ask ourselves the question from last week's Gospel, "Who is Jesus for us really? What kind of answer do our lives speak?" Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "What you do speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you say." And so, are we followers of Jesus or simply fans? It really makes a difference one way or the other. Our Church, our world, our families and our Faith Community need heroes who will pursue not only their own dreams, but also God's dream of a better world. And God's truly needs all of us to make that dream come true. May we all follow Jesus to make it happen in the reality of our everyday lives and in the lives of those around us.