**14th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B**

Ez 2: 2-5; 2 Cor 12: 7-10; Mk 6: 1-6a

July 7/8, 2012

I love the Church. I love its richness and the beauty of the sacraments. I love its catholicity, in other words its inclusiveness of so many people, cultures and languages. I love its art and architecture. I love its traditions. I love its reverence for the dignity of each human life. I love its outreach to the poor, to the unborn, to the sick and the aged. I love its veneration of the Blessed Mother and the saints. I love all these things about the Church. It has been a part of my family’s heritage for generations.

But there is an even more important reason why I love the Church. I love her because it is in her that I have met Jesus Christ.

Now, I know you are probably thinking, “Deacon Bob! That is a little over the top, isn’t it? Of course you would say that, being a deacon and all.”

Well, I am not just saying it because I am a deacon. I am saying it because it is true. In a very real way, I have met Jesus in the Church. I cannot deny this anymore than I can deny my own name or who I am or my own origins.

Once you have encountered Jesus, you can no longer deny he is alive in the Church. To meet Jesus is to be changed permanently. That is why the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy orders leave what we call an indelible mark on our souls. It’s a way of saying that once Jesus grabs on to you, he doesn’t let go.

The Church, my friends, is the Mystical Body of Christ. Jesus lives, breathes and works in and through the Church.

“But Deacon Bob, what about all the sin in the Church? What about all the politics, the scandals, our loss of trust in the bishops and priests because of the hurt done to our children?”

Yes we, the People of God have taken it on the chin in a lot of ways in recent years: Sexual abuse of minors, bad press, scandals, and the sudden fall of several prominent and famous priests. I too am angered by it. I too am a father! As the Scriptures say, “Better for a millstone to be tied to his neck and he be cast into the sea than for him to harm even one of the children.”

Each and every defect is made known in today’s world. I am not saying that is bad. It does help hold responsible those guilty of hurting the weak and vulnerable, those who break their sacred trust. But I also think Satan can use it to his advantage,

When Satan strikes the shepherds of the flock, causing them to fall into disgrace and sin, then he is able to scatter the flock. If he can cast doubt into our minds about the truth of the Church, he wins.

His victory, though, will be short-lived!

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, and because Jesus continues to live in the Church, it can be said that the Church is both holy and perfect. The Church is also the People of God, as the Second Vatican Council said, and so it can also be said that it is a Church of sinners who are flawed and weak and in constant need of God’s healing and grace.

Jesus is perfectly human and perfectly divine, but his disciples and apostles whom he left behind as his Church were terribly flawed men and women. Sinful men and women who have met Jesus and have known him, men and women sent by God to carry on his work until he returns in glory.

Have you ever thought, though, that this may be the a reason why we should listen and find the Catholic Church credible, believable?

Weak and frail men are often the true bearers of the Gospel, not those who make themselves out to be strong and faultless.

We heard in the Gospel today that Jesus was not accepted in his native place because of their lack of faith. The people didn’t think he was perfect enough to listen to him.

We heard in the second reading that St. Paul, the great prophet and evangelizer, was beset by habitual sin (a thorn in his side) and ongoing weakness.

Maybe we should beware of those prophets who seem too popular, too successful, too glamorous or perfect. If they don’t have a “thorn in their side,” maybe we shouldn’t listen too closely.

The ones to whom we should probably listen to are the blemished ones, the ones that seem flawed and human, ordinary, humble and familiar. You know, the ones in your native place.

Perhaps that is why we should find the Catholic Church believable; not because it is humanly perfect, but because it is not on a human plane.

Let us not allow the behavior, the sins or even the crimes of some to blind us to the truth of the Church and of the message of the Gospel which is preached throughout the world by the Catholic Church! Let us not allow the sins of our fathers to cast doubt into our minds about the Truth of God’s love revealed to us by Jesus through the ministry of the Church!

Yes, my friends, love the Church. Love its richness and beauty. Love its inclusiveness and catholicity. You will find in her find sinners and saints, law abiding citizens and criminals, the healthy and the sick, the old and the young. The Church is your family. It is the People of God who long to see His face.

In the Church you meet Jesus and you will be changed forever.