

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [A]

Ezekiel 18: 25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

How deep are the roots of the faith and Christian life?

Let me make the question even more personal: how deep are the roots of the faith and Christian life in our community? In our three Catholic parishes? In our Catholic school?

It was amid hardships and pressures that previous Catholics remained faithful to Christ and His Church. And so it remains today.

Roots of the faith and Christian life are deep *here* because of the sacrifices forefamilies made. They accepted personal disadvantages in order to live the faith. Let's not romanticize the immigrant Catholics who first brought the faith and Christian life here.

Let us not for a single moment forget the sacrifices and sufferings of the German Catholics who founded Holy Angels and St. Mary's and the Irish Catholics who founded Sts. Peter and Paul and later the Italian Catholics who joined them there.

We all do well to remember gratefully the priests and sisters who assisted the first Catholic generations here.

Roots of the faith and Christian life here run deep. Roots of the faith and Christian life have been borrowed deeply through the faith-full response of believers from former ages to the adversities they then faced.

We see God's presence most clearly in those who dare to deepen their roots of faith and Christian living. We call them *saints*.

Their witness to the faith – their deep roots of faith and Christian life – can give us courage to begin anew today.

Above all we might think of two American saints who both still have connections *right here* in our own area: *St. John Neumann* and *St. Elizabeth Ann Seton*.

John Neumann himself came from a foreign land, from modern day Czech Republic, what then was referred to as Bohemia. After finishing his studies for the priesthood his bishop decided that there were too many priests and there would be no more ordinations there. Neumann set sail for America with the hope of being ordained a priest. After his ordination in 1836, he was assigned by the bishop to work with German immigrants in mission churches around Niagara Falls and beyond – he administered the Sacraments, visited the sick, taught the

catechism and trained teachers to take over after he left. His missionary work brought him for awhile to Peru, Ohio. Still later John became the third bishop of Philadelphia where he established the first Catholic diocesan school system in the country.

Elizabeth Ann Seton is the first native born U.S. citizen to be declared a saint. A busy mother with five children, she always had a great heart for the poor and even organized other mothers to help those in most need. In fact, it was Elizabeth's deep concern for others that led her into the Catholic Church – yes the first U.S. citizen canonized a saint is a convert to the faith. Upon the death of her husband and departure of her children, she became a sister and established her own religious community dedicated to caring for the children of the poor – the first religious community founded in the U.S. Her legacy helped hatch Catholic schools, hospital and social services all over the country and in Ohio. St. Vincent Hospital in Toledo and the multi-state Mercy Health Care System are among her institutional descendents.

What do these saints have in common? How might we discover qualities of their lives and make them fruitful for our own daily living?

The saints show us that it is truly possible and good to live our relationship with God in a wholehearted way, to put God first and not as one concern among others. The saints help us to see that God first reached out to us, He revealed and continues to reveal Himself to us in Jesus Christ. Christ comes towards us, He speaks to every individual and invites everyone to follow Him. The saints are the ones who made the very most of the opportunity, they reached out to God from deep within themselves. And in return they received from God the light that shows where true life is to be found.

Friends in Christ If we dare to open ourselves up to the whole faith and to the testimony given to it in the whole Church, then the Catholic faith also has a real future as a public force in Sandusky.

The saints show us the great fruitfulness of a life lived for God and others. They show us amazing and lasting influences that are at play even today in the daily lives of so many people.

Saints, even if there are only a few of them, *change the world in which we live..*

That is exactly what we need *right now*.

What we need are a few saints *right here*.