

11th Sunday

1. A rear-view mirror view, the view from the back window of a car. In a car we see things as we approach them, but then, if we are not the driver and are really fascinated by what we have seen, we turn around and look at the same things through the rear window. Then we see the same things again but they look different.

2. It is the same with our lives. We experience so many things as we drive through life, but as the drive gets longer and we have covered a lot of ground, we tend to turn around more and more and look back at the same things, but now from the rear-view window. And sometimes we realize that although they are the same things, they look different now. We think we can see them more clearly and in a larger context now.

3. It is the same with our lives of faith. Look at Israel in our first reading. She has made it out of Egypt, out of slavery, and now in the safety of the desert God's tells her to look back and see what she has been through. "Don't you realize that I bore you up on eagle wings?" God tells her. That phrase, eagle wings, has become so familiar to us these past thirty or forty years because of that

popular hymn, one often used at funeral Masses, and appropriately so, because we do believe that in death God will bear us up on eagle wings. It is a way of describing our resurrection, our passing into God's own life. Here God is telling Israel that He has supported her through all her trials—on eagle wings!

4. In our second reading for today Paul wants the Christians in Rome to look back at what Jesus did for them when they were still in their sins. "He died for you," he tells them. Human love begins with the attractiveness of the beloved. We are attracted by what we see and hear. Not so with the kind of love Jesus showed for us. What he saw were sinners, unattractive people, people made ugly through their evilness. Yet he loved them even then. This is a different kind of love. It is not a response to the attractive. It is totally gratuitous. It loves when and where there is nothing to call it forth except its own force. It is pure gift. And Paul remembers that well. It was Jesus who overtook him in his hatred, knocking him from his horse, blinding him so as to open his eyes to a new kind of love.

5. We often proclaim our belief that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are one and the same. But if that is true, then we should say the same characteristics in the God

of the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament. Is that true? The God of the OT, the God who bore his people up on eagle wings, was a God of compassion and concern and love, and that is the God Jesus reveals to us. Jesus is moved with compassion for the lost crowds which gather to hear his words.

6. If we are going to be followers of Jesus, we must be compassionate people. “Oh,” we will say to ourselves, “that is not hard. I am a softy. I cry at the drop of a hat.” But sometimes don’t we find ourselves lacking compassion? Are we not immunized by an overexposure to suffering? Don’t we find it hard at times to feel compassion for the suffering? We watch the television and we see photos of the parents in China whose children were buried in a poorly built school. Someone caught corners building it, I suppose, to make more money, not thinking that this building would be the victim of a massive earthquake, not thinking that his profit would cost many their lives, young, innocent lives, and cause untold sorrow to their parents, many of whom lost their only child. You know that couples are allowed just one child in China. What does a couple in its middle or late forties now do? Start over? And, more selfishly, who will now look after them in their old age.

7. We look at these images and we are sorry for these people, but our lives are so far removed from them. We can simply tune them out and get on with whatever we are doing. We may feel a bit guilty about doing this, but, on the other hand, our own lives must go on.

8. What does it mean for us to be like Jesus, to be moved by the suffering of those around us? If we look back through our rear-view windows and reflect on the love which God has poured out on us in and through all the loving people who have been part of our lives—parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, good friends—we may be so overwhelmed by this love that we will feel almost forced to share it with others. We will want to pass it on. Having been loved, we will want to love in turn. Let us reflect on our lives and discover how we have been borne up on eagle wings yesterday and today. Then let us make an act of faith that this same love will also be there for us tomorrow. Let us look back on the love which the Lord Jesus displayed for us even though at the time we did not recognize it. And then let us look around us and see those who seem troubled and abandoned. It is to them that we are now sent. “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.” These words are addressed to us, the believers of today, the church

of today, today's followers of the compassionate Jesus. Let us do what they tell us to do!