

**REJUVENATION**  
**September 17, 2006**  
**Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr**

Even though we returned to our Fall schedule the week after Labor Day, last Sunday was, for us, *Home Coming Sunday* and what a delightful day it was as we go through the withdrawal symptoms from what for many was a very pleasant summer.

Chances are that last Sunday, or something like that is prevalent in parishes all around the country. Some call it *Rally Sunday* or *Kick off Sunday*. Summer is over. It's time to come alive! The Choir is back in good form. Adults and children will settle into the routines they will follow for the next nine months. Christian education programs, in hibernation over the summer are revived with a fresh vigor. Classrooms are ready. Teachers will look to the words from Isaiah in today's Old Testament reading about being gifted with *the tongue of teacher* that they may know how to *sustain the weary with a word* (Isaiah 50:4).

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Whether it's *Homecoming, Rally, or Kick-off Sunday*, it means also the end of sanctioned backsliding from Summer worship. The time is at hand for us to get back in high gear. These twin themes of rallying and rejuvenation are the clarion calls of the day. The appearance of the passage from Mark containing Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi, that Jesus is the Messiah, is perfect for this day. We can focus on the disciples' uncovering the first secret of Jesus' being: *You are the Messiah* (8:29b). But this passage has a much harder sequel. It is an unsettling sequel, which leads to the revelation of Jesus' second secret, that is, by Divine necessity, the Messiah must *undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days, rise* (v. 3).

If Jesus had stopped there, with the prediction of his tragic demise and ultimate resurrection, we probably could still pull off some kind of rally people would get

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behind. But Jesus himself is not what you might call a *rally day* preacher. He can never be accused of luring disciples to follow him by any way other than unadorned spiritual reality. He makes no sugar coated promises to any would be follower. What he *does* say is that the person who follows him must be ready to say *No* to herself or himself on a continuing basis. So, there goes most of the rally mood right there. But, on top of that, Jesus declares that the person who follows him must be ready to be regarded as a criminal and ready to die like a criminal for his cause (v. 34). Jesus is quite clear about the need for commitment to the Kingdom of God, a commitment that requires nothing less than the totality of one's life. His promise is that the Gospel life is most profoundly experienced through those committed to dying to self and living wholly for God and his purpose. We need only look to the late Mother Teresa to see the embodiment of what he asked.

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What Jesus is saying is that the I that dies with him is raised up as a new consecrated I. It is an I derived from God and thus from the life of faith. It is not an I derived from the world nor defined by the world, by what the world deems worthy. It is a blessed, risk taking, death defying I through whom God forms the We of the Body of Christ and through whom the Gospel spreads.

If we look at the reality of our Baptismal Service, rather than *rally day*, or whatever Churches choose to call their inaugural Sunday, maybe we should call it *reality* Sunday. In Baptism we promise to turn to Jesus and accept him as our savior, to put our trust in his grace and love, to follow and obey him as Lord. In the Baptismal Covenant, we all promise to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being. We state very clearly

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that in the waters of Baptism, *we are buried with Christ in his death* and, by them, *we share in his Resurrection*. The parallel between what we do in Baptism and Christ's call for dying to self and living for God is unmistakable.

If we accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord and ignore his call for sacrificial commitment to God and each other, we have heard only *half* a Gospel and are only half committed. We've had the rally all right, but we've missed the *reality!* This might be as good a day as any to set things straight.

**AMEN.**