

9 Ordinary A 2008

St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

I have a funny habit that not many people know about. In my shirt pocket, I carry around pictures of my nieces and nephews. There are 9 of them now, so my pocket is getting pretty full! Occasionally, I take out those pictures, wonder how the kids are doing, and say a prayer for them. It's a rather odd little habit, I admit, but it helps me to remember my nieces and nephews and think about them. A couple of weeks ago, Dr. Chuck asked me why I didn't have a picture of him in my pocket, and I replied, "The pictures are of those I want to think about daily." I'm not sure he caught the gist of my reply. But have you ever noticed how easy it is to forget about people we have known? Can you still recall the names of your best friends in high school? It's like that old saying "out of sight, out of mind." You see, our memories are like our cell phone batteries: they are always running down and they constantly need to be recharged and refreshed. Think about it for a moment: why does Nike pay Tiger Woods millions of dollars to put that Nike swoosh on his hat and shirt and even his shoes? They know every time we see that Nike logo, our memories are "recharged" and we'll remember that when we go to buy our next pair of shoes. You know, we have 17,000 parishioners and they see me every Sunday. Heck, if someone gave me a million dollars, I would **tattoo** that Nike swoosh on my forehead! But you see, when something is out of sight, it is out of mind, and it will soon be out of our memory.

In the first reading today we see that memory loss is not a modern phenomenon: even 4000 years ago Moses was concerned about it. After God gives Moses the laws of His covenant, He tells the people to tie little bracelets on their arms, and pendants around their foreheads, with the commandments inside them. Some Jews still do that today. Why? Because if they don't, they'll soon forget them. What is out of sight, is out of mind, and will soon be out of your memory. In fact, the long history of Israel in the Old Testament reads like a tragic tale of forgetting God, being punished, remembering God, and then forgetting Him again. Why does the 3rd commandment about keeping holy the Sabbath begin with the words: "**remember** to keep holy the Sabbath day..."? God urges us to *remember* because we are prone to *forget*. Just like our cell phones, so, too, our memories are slowly losing juice, and they need to be recharged and refreshed. Otherwise, we will forget.

One of the greatest epic stories ever written was the *Odyssey* by the Greek playwright, Homer. It is one of the classics of Western literature. It recalls the long, perilous journey home of one of the heroes of the Trojan War, Odysseus. The war lasted for 10 years and then Odysseus' journey home to Ithaca took another 10 years; for 20 years he was away from home. But in my mind what's even more heroic was the love of his wife, Penelope, and how she stays faithful to him for 20 years. You see, she's not sure if Odysseus is dead, can you imagine how hard that would be? Moreover, suitors have come insisting she marry one of them,

which was the custom of the time. But she refuses to be unfaithful to her husband; she must be sure of his fate. In other words, even though Odysseus was out of her sight, he was not out of her mind, and therefore he was not out of her memory or her heart. That's what made her love more heroic than Odysseus' victories on the battlefield.

Folks, what are the things out of your sight, and therefore out of your mind and slowly slipping out of your memory? How many of us take a hard line against our immigrants today because we have forgotten that we are all children of immigrants? I know immigration is complicated, but isn't a sort of "collective amnesia" of our own past part of the problem? Or, how quickly have some of us forgotten that there's a war going on in Iraq and Afghanistan because we no longer see it in the headlines? When was the last time we prayed for the safety of our troops? How long has it been since you visited the cemetery where your grandparents or parents or spouse is buried to clean their graves and plant new flowers? Have we all but forgotten about them since we no longer see them? Or, how many Catholics are playing golf right now, or fishing, or sleeping in today because they have forgotten to go to Mass? (Bet you're glad you remembered to come to Mass today, aren't you?!) But you see what happens: what is out of sight is out of mind, and therefore fading fast from our memories. We need to find ways to keep our minds refreshed, and remember those things that are so important.

You know, some things and some people we don't have to try hard to remember, for example, there's no way you can forget Dr. Chuck – he won't let us forget him! But most things we struggle to remember. Will you remember this homily an hour from now, a day from now, a week from now? Out of sight is out of mind, and soon will be out of our memory.

Praised be Jesus Christ!