



# 150TH ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 23, 2012

*Psalm 42:1-8; Exodus 17:1-7; Revelation 22:1-5*

*In nomine Jesu!*

It has been a great pleasure to be here at Saint Peter's Church, marking the 150th Anniversary of this amazing community of faith. And it is especially good to be with you here at Jazz Vespers. This ministry is one of the many that marks this congregation in our City, in the Church and in the World.

So I am delighted to worship with you.

I understand that many tall people experience acrophobia as I do: fear of heights. And it has not been a product of my age. I remember, distinctly, a trip to the Statue of Liberty when I was 6 years old, visiting with my family. Back then you could climb up the arm. But I was 6 years old, dragging along, so my father had to carry me the last series of steps. Then. . . I wouldn't look out. I was afraid of the height. And subsequently afraid of my father's anger!

I tell you this because, in spite of my continued acrophobia, I am always captivated when crossing the Hudson River on the Tappan Zee Bridge. I drive very slowly so I can catch glimpses of the River that capture me, snare me, pull me in. It is a boundless riverscape up there, especially in autumn, and in every season, the river itself is glittering, stunning, mysterious.

That's what water does to me, and I suspect to many of you. Water is a symbol of life's fullness. It draws us in. And the Readings from Exodus and Revelation have water flowing through them.

On this Anniversary Day, these readings remind us that we are called by God to be people of water, people of tears, people called through the water of Baptism to a new life of reliance on the God who saves, people longing for justice to roll down.

Can we, together, experience the grace of water shimmering in the distance along our journey, rushing down, splashing, beading on our bodies?

Can we plunge deeply into the experience of it in this Vespers liturgy tonight?

Can we be agents, as Saint Peter's Church has been for a hundred and fifty years, for the justice of God to flow in our City and our World?

With apologies for those who heard me this morning at Mass, I remind you that we are called to love our sisters and brothers, love them at least as much as we love ourselves. For loving our sisters and brothers is like loving God, loving as Jesus has loved us. In our world, in our City, in our lives this command no longer lives in glorious abstraction. It is splendidly, fearfully, gloriously concrete.

How do we love as God has loved us?

First, it is an incarnate love. Living in God's river of justice, we play a loving role in Jesus' programmatic declaration of his own mission in Nazareth's synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to let the oppressed go free."

Second, we share this mission as servants of the God who came among us not to be served but to serve. So we dare not imitate the rulers Jesus experienced, the rulers we experience, who lord it over people as tyrants with our noses stuck up in the air. We are called not only to walk humbly with our God, but to walk humbly with our people.

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And third, we share the mission of God as suffering servants, washed in the river of God's grace and carried on the streams of God's mercy even when it is difficult or painful. Here is the heart, the marrow of the ministry of Saint Peter's Church of which this Jazz Community is such an integral part. You know what it means to serve people. You know that the greatest of loves which Jesus lauded is to lay down life itself for those we love, our whole life. Living in the river of God's Justice is a ceaseless journey to the cross, a daily dying and rising to life, a dying and rising in installments.

On this great day, as we mark the remarkable history of this wonderful congregation and its ministry in our City and our World, I urge you to go forth with fresh confidence, aware that God gives you the strength and courage you need to serve people with justice. God strengthens you as you put your hope in God, aware that you are riding on the river of God's mercy. It is water from the rock of Christ, ours not because we knew where to find it, not because we knew how to ask for it, but because God is God.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Rev. Dr. Robert Alan Rimbo, Bishop  
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