32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time: 11/6/22—9:30 and 11:30 AM

Earlier this week, I came across a Ziggy comic strip with Ziggy looking at his TV and the announcer saying to him from the TV: **“Welcome to the all-campaign-ad channel!!”** Seeing that Ziggy comic reminded me of another election-related comic I saw during the 2020 campaign season. That earlier comic strip showed a man facing three versions of Hell. One was **“eternal flames.”** Another was **“eternal freeze.”** But the third was **“eternal election year.”** When asked to tell the devil his choice of Hell, the man responds, **“Hold on…I’m thinking, I’m thinking!”** Can you think of anything worse than an **“all-campaign-ad channel”** on TV? And I guess an **“eternal election year”** could be considered comparable to **“eternal flames”** and **“eternal freeze.”** Fortunately, as of Tuesday, those campaign ads will go away for another two years.

When I see those ads, I wonder “how did things get to be so nasty and contentious?” Yet, things being nasty and contentious isn’t unique to our times, for we find them even reflected in today’s Scripture readings. In Second Maccabees, it’s the mother and her seven sons against the Greek officials who are trying to get those sons to violate their Jewish faith by eating pork. In Second Thessalonians, Paul is encouraging the community to stand steadfast against **“perverse and wicked people”** who are threatening their Christian faith. In the Gospel, it is Jesus who is being opposed by the Sadducees who are trying to trip him up on the question of whether there is life after death. Where does this nastiness and contention come from? I wonder if the source of the problem isn’t a matter of how we see, our spiritual eye-sight, a matter of vision, of where we are focusing our gaze. I would describe this difference as being between those are navel-gazers and those who are star-gazers. Navel-gazers are those who limit their vision to their own personal wants and needs, but star-gazers are those whose vision is universal, in fact, meaning including the whole Universe.

I think it was the great British writer C.S.Lewis who, in the last century, said that it is good that we humans cannot see the stars during the daytime because, if so, all we would do is look up at the sky and never get anything done. I remember as a young kid looking at the sky in my backyard at night and being amazed at how many stars I could see and amazed by their beauty. But it seems to me that our problem today is just the opposite: It’s because of light pollution that we can’t see the stars at all anymore and so we get focused only on this Earth forgetting that we are part of a much larger Universe created by our God who is love.

Unfortunately, because we can’t see the stars at night any more, we forget how small our Earth is in that Universe and how we humans are people who are living and surviving in one little lifeboat called “Earth.” Because we don’t see the stars, all we see is ourselves, that is, our desires, wants, and needs forgetting that we all are riding in that one little lifeboat. Rather, our God calls us to be, what I would call, star-gazers rather than navel-gazers, seeing not only our own desires, our own opinions, our own concerns, our own beliefs but remembering that we all are creatures fashioned by the same God, remembering that God has created each one of us to be unique, one of a kind, and remembering that our God placed us all on this planet circling one minor star intending that we work together to solve our world’s problems because we all are residents in this one little lifeboat.

If only those Greek officials opposing the woman and her sons would have taken the time to understand this family’s Jewish faith, if only those people whom St. Paul described as **“perverse and wicked”** would have taken the time to understand what St. Paul was offering to them, if only the Sadducees would have opened their closed minds to the wisdom, beauty, and hope that Jesus was offering to them, they all would have found a gift beyond measure, beyond price. Sadly, all of them chose to be navel-gazers rather than star-gazers. But isn’t that the same temptation we face in our own times, that is, seeing and valuing only our own desires, our own opinions, our own concerns, our own beliefs? Doesn’t our God call us, rather, to be star-gazers, remembering that he has created each one of us as unique, one of a kind? Doesn’t our God call us to be star-gazers, remembering that he placed us all on this planet to work together to solve our world’s problems because we all are residents in this one little lifeboat we call Earth?