

It's a strange Valentine good wish card we get from Jesus today. We know what the Hallmark cards say --- Oh, I hope you are always happy, always full of life's good things, always understood and loved by everyone around you. Jesus comes and says: The Father and I want your holiness. Our love for you is deeper than just some weak desire you avoid any difficulties. We want your holiness. So, I hope sometimes you let your own sorrow, the sorrow of others and the deep sorrow of the world come and wound you ... so you'll seek God. The Father and I want your holiness. So I hope sometimes you feel empty inside --- it will, if you let it, lead you to God, who can fill you fuller than food or money. Finally, I hope your life, with God absolutely first, is so strange and enigmatic that people think you're crazy.

It takes stamina to be a Christian. Life can be a desert. You and I had better be planted as close to Jesus Christ as a tree is planted close to a stream. The heat comes, the horrifying year of drought or dreadful economy. But our leaves still stay green.

There's a story in Greek mythology of Antaeus, a huge blood-thirsty giant in Libya who collected skulls of his victims to build a temple to his father. The hero Hercules set out to destroy him, but it was pretty hard because he was a giant and his mother was the earth goddess. Every time he overcame the giant and threw him down to earth Antaeus would miraculously renew all his strength and sprang up to fight again. Finally Hercules figured out that when he was in contact with his mom the earth, strength poured into him, but if he was lifted up above the ground he was as weak as other men. So Hercules did what Hercules needed to do by holding up and giving him a bear hug.

It's the same with Christians and the Christian church. As long as we're in touch with Jesus, planted by the stream, grafted onto the vine ... we are pretty much invincible. Even with death and sins and the heat and drought ... we are told by St. Paul ... the dead are literally raised. Let's spend 30 seconds praying that our connection with Jesus ... and the connection of this parish ... begun in Baptism and deepened in the sacraments, always grows and always deepens. *(pause & pray)*

(From presider's chair) I need to end this homily time with something a little more mundane. This week you'll be receiving ... if you're a parishioner ... a letter, brochure and envelope about our diocese's Annual Ministries Appeal. Our bishop and the diocese do plenty of wonderful things that our beyond the resources of a single parish --- formation of priests and deacons, accreditation of Catholic schools, professional counsel with legal problems, representation in Sacramento, outreach to prisons and universities, catechist preparation and so forth. Bishop Garcia and the diocese count on this annual collection to keep up with expenses. Each parishioner with an average income is asked to give or pledge \$250. Lots of you just can't this year --- I understand; I hope you give something. Some of you can give lots more --- I hope you'll consider it ... to make up for what the others just can't do this year. Once our parish reaches its goal, we keep the rest here. Last year's money went for new appliances in the parish hall, more money for the parish Charities emergency fund, and to pay down our Cislini Youth Center debt. This year's surplus will go to painting the inside of the parish hall, new bathroom fixtures

there, and of course a lot more money for the Charity fund. Anyway, read your materials and come next week --- the first week of Lent --- all ready to give. Thanks!