***Weekend Homily***

***13th Sunday Cycle A***

***July 2, 2017***

**There is in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah in the OT a powerful verse, a verse worth memorizing and living our lives by. It goes like this “Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm.” The awful truth is into the lives of most of us can come crushing moments, moments so painful, so devastating that were it not for God, and his grace and our faith in him, we would never be able to survive them.**

**I think back for example to an experience I had a couple of years ago. I had two very difficult funerals within a month; both were soldiers; both were 24 years old; both served in Afghanistan; both suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome; both committed suicide.**

**One of them was Sargent Cody---that’s not his real name but I am using it to protect the privacy of his family. Anyway at Cody’s funeral I read a portion of a letter a young soldier wrote to Cody’s parents. He served under their son’s command. Here is part of what he wrote.**

***“When I arrived at the unit I was just a private and Cody was a high speed motivated specialist, tons of energy and never skipped a step. He actually made us all look like a bunch of slackers. I’m not just glorifying him given these recent events---it just seemed like he was always three steps ahead of everyone---and the go to guy when an NCO had a question or needed some soldiers disciplined.***

***In our last deployment to Afghanistan I had the most amazing stroke of luck, getting landed into his squad for the last four months of our tour. Call me what you will, but I would have gladly walked into the middle of a fight knowing that I had little to no chance of returning as long as Sargent Cody told me to---and I would never have to worry---he would be right there with me. I not only had ironclad respect for Cody but also a friendship that will never see its last day.***

***Without a doubt he made my life worth living both during our tour and back in the garrison. Cody was my friend, my confident and a book of answers to anything I needed to know when I had a question---and was there for me in a split second no matter what I needed when I needed it. And would always gladly put his neck on the line when we were right. A no bullshit kind of guy.***

***I guess the saying is true---God always calls the young cuz God knows Cody did his job here on earth and is onto bigger and better things.”***

***Four months later I had Cody’s sister’s wedding. He was supposed to be the best man. Throughout the service I saw his mother tearful and clutching something to her chest. I couldn’t make out what it was.***

***After the service I went back into the church to get my homily which I left on the pulpit. As I walked by the pew where his mother had sat I noticed what it was she had been holding---there on the pew was a framed picture of Cody.”***

***As his mother tearfully clung to that picture during the wedding Mass she was clinging to God and her faith to get her through the service. “Unless your faith is firm you shall not be firm,” the Prophet Isaiah tells us.***

***Where does such firm faith come from--- to get us through moments like that? It comes from only one place. It comes from listening to Christ and taking his words in, and responding to them and living by them even when what the Lord says to us is challenging like in today’s gospel.***

***“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.”***

***There is no softening these words of Jesus. What the Lord requires is that we love him and God above all else in life. That is the rock on which a firm faith is built. And it’s true for us as individuals, and as a Church, and yes, even for us as a country.***

***This weekend we celebrate the 241st anniversary of the founding of our nation. Back in 1776 our forefathers, men of outstanding faith and vision, gave birth to a nation unlike any the world had ever known or even conceived of to that point.***

***Inspired by the spirit of our Judeo-Christian faith they founded a nation based on freedom, and belief in God, and upon the consent of the governed; a nation that recognized and cherished the dignity and worth of every human being.***

***As our founding fathers declared our independence from England it was their firm conviction that God himself was bringing about a new promised land on our shores; a country and a people that would be a force for good in the world.***

***And our founding fathers were right! I mean no nation in history has saved the world from evil and tyranny more often than our nation; no nation has made the world a better or safer place than this nation; no other nation has been as good or just or compassionate toward others---even toward its enemies as our country has been.***

***Think of the Marshal Plan---how after WW II we rebuilt the countries of former enemies like Germany and Japan that we had conquered. That was unheard of---it had never happened before in history. But this country did it.***

***It’s not that our country has been perfect---or without its flaws and failings and struggles. We have had our share of those. But there is an abiding goodness to America that has everything to do with our belief in God, and the Judeo-Christian values and principles upon which our country was founded---that is what has made us great.***

***President Regan once referred to our country as a shining city on a hill, as the best hope for mankind---and he was right. Can you imagine what the world would look like had America never existed. We would all be speaking either German or Japanese. More to the point can you image the plight of the world today without the United States.***

***Think of Iran and that Islamic nation’s quest for nuclear weapons; think of North Korea that has them and is threatening to use them; think of ISIS and all the Islamic terrorists around the world who seek to impose on everyone their version of Islam and Shira law. Was it not for America, was it not for this beloved country of ours, and its power and leadership, what chance would the world have against these evil forces that threaten to overwhelm and destroy it?***

***This weekend as we celebrate our 241st birthday there is great deal of turmoil in our nation and forces at work that would destroy this country from within. I am sure that is something God will not allow to happen. But if there has ever been a time in our history when we as a nation have needed to turn to God and cling to him in faith that time is now. For as the Prophet Isaiah tells us—unless our faith is firm, we shall not be firm.***

***May God bless our beloved country; may our best days be ahead of us.***