John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.
Homily for the Eight Sunday of the Year (A)
Regis Evening
John's Island Club
Indian River Shores, FL
February 25th, 2017

Isaiah 49: 14-15
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Matthew 6:24-34

"Prophets announce future promise. They also unmask idols of the present. .. This is why they are resented" (Kavanaugh, The Word Encountered, I 06).

So, "in Israel's god forsakenness, she is reminded, 'Can a mother be without tenderness for the child of her womb?' The unthinkable would have to happen before Israel could be lost or forgotten" (Kavanaugh, The Word Embodied, 71).

The future and the promise articulated by the prophet Isaiah rings right, plays well, sounds good. That is, until we remember the moment when the prophecy is uttered. Israel is in exile. Her leaders killed or accused of collaboration and sycophancy to other political powers. It is as William Butler Yeats said in a different age, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity" (W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," 11. 7-8).

Paul responds with the right answer but it is hard to take, hard to trust. He places his destiny in the judgment of God alone. For the prophet and the apostle, there is only one security, one master. "Undivided hearts [both], they inhabit a world of faith where one lives without fear" (Kavanaugh, 71). These are not calls to abandon the world. Quite the contrary. These are calls to see the world as God sees it.

Thus it is when Jesus tells us that we cannot serve two masters; we cannot serve God and the idol of our fears. All idol worship is a compensatory strategy, a palliation of the fear that articulates our deepest anxiety.

For ancient Israel, the anxiety is, "Will You, God, be there for me even though I have disobeyed and have no claim on You?"

For Paul and so many of the early Christians, it is, "How do we live and thrive in a world that so often rejects transcendent Divine mystery "dwindled" to human flesh in Jesus?"
For us here today, the dilemma persists. "Even if we manage to entrust ourselves and our loved ones into the hands of God, our social and political world can fill us with dread" (73). Russia invades the Crimea, Genocide, yet again, in Nigeria. The sacrifice of unborn innocents to fears and other perceived needs. The ridicule of women longing to have a respected voice of agency in the corridors of power and even over their own bodies.

"Some worry for the future of the Church: it is so rigid, it is so lax. Others stew over the state of the nation: so proud, brought [to a political standstill and paralysis" (73).

"Who or what can solve this latest crisis? Where can we turn?" (73)

"In all things, what is our rock, what is our hope, what is our safety, what is our strength? And in all things, the answer bears a person's name, the only person who can serve as our security without becoming an idol that enslaves us in fear" (73).

Jesus.

That is why we are here. Together. Now.