

Homily
3/17/19
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“Before sin, the devil tempts with presumption of God’s mercy. After the sin is committed, he tempts despair of ever being forgiven by God. Before sin the temptation is to reduce the significance of serious sin to something insignificant. After sin, the temptation is to exaggerate the sin to something that is beyond the power of the infinite of mercy of God to forgive. Now when a soul does confess sin, the devil then moves on to tempt it with a fear of not having the means to attain the goal of perfection. He points out our weaknesses, he accuses us of all the sinful things that we have done, and the good we have failed to do. He tells us that it is pride to think that we could ever really become holy. When it is really a subtle form of pride and self-reliance to think that we can.”

I rarely read actually a text from any sort, but I’ve been reading and reflecting on that passage all week, and it just kind of hit me when I was reading it on Thursday, that that’s one of the struggles that we have with today’s readings. Cause all of today’s reading are speaking today in a very intimate way about trust in God. Trust in the One who has all of our needs, all of our concerns as His primary goal.

His primary goal and function is to give us what we need. But at some point in our lives we stop believing that. We stop praying to God out of necessity and begin to treat him less as God almighty, and more as Santa Christ or Genie Christ, where we pray for what we want, and when we don’t get it, we become upset with God. “Why God don’t you give me everything that I want?” Because many times, His response is “If I gave you everything that you want, you’d never you’d never receive what you actually need.”

We are reminded in our Gospel today through the Beatitudes, in a very specific way, that life isn’t for this existence. It is for what’s to come. We are not called to store up treasures here, but instead to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

We saw a glimpse of this about 15 years ago in the movie “Bruce Almighty.” We’ve got Jim Carey playing God. And he is so bombarded and inundated with all of these prayer requests: help me win the lottery, help my team win, help this happen, all of these selfish things, and he’s so bombarded that he does the most

lazy thing he could think to do. Took it out of his head, put it into an email server. And to go even further, instead of responding individually, he says: Respond yes to all.

How did that turn out? Well, within 24 hours, the world almost ended. That's what happens when we get what we want. Because many times, our desires are selfish. We want, we want, we want, we want...we rarely want to give. we are great receivers, sometimes we are horrible givers. And to truly trust in God, we must not receive, but we must be willing to give. And we have to give the most precious thing in our lives over to God: Control. That's hard. That's terrifying.

I can remember, growing up, driving, I always felt safe when my dad drove. Growing up, I would only ride with my dad driving. But when I got my own license, I don't like to ride with anyone else anymore because I like to have control. When I'm driving, I know how to slow down, I know how to speed up, I know how to avoid this, and how to avoid that. (Except for that police car last year. But that was his fault, not mine!)

But that's the struggle we have in our lives. We want to have that control, right? Because in giving over that control we feel like we are taking a piece of who we are and abandoning it. The reality is that's the best thing we could ever do. We look at our lives, and we say, why did this happen, and this happen and this happen?

I got a new answer this past week, to why do bad things happen to good people? Because God gives us the opportunity to rely upon Him. I had to sit and pray with that for a few minutes...because I always heard bad things happen to good people because good people have not stood up for those other good people.

But when I look at those incidents in my own life, I look at tornadoes, and cancer and these horrific things that have happened in our lives and in our world, and I say, God's right. We haven't trusted Him yet. We haven't trusted in the Lord and that may be our foundational and our fundamental problem as Christians and as Catholics.

It's easy for us to call ourselves Christian and then to become hypocrites. It's easy for us to say we want to do something and then do something different. It's hard for us to trust. We learned at a very young age, "fool me once shame on

you, fool me twice, shame on me. So we put these walls, we put up our defenses, and we don't allow anyone in. Even God.

And so then that part of our lives that is supposed to be filled with God's love, filled with His presence is empty, because we've put these walls up, we fill it with addictions. We fill it with pride, we fill it with arrogance, we fill it with lust, we fill it with jealousy, we fill it with alcohol, we fill it with drugs, we fill it with all of these things that give us a momentary glimpse of happiness, or at least release, and then we go back to hating ourselves again.

The reality is, we've got to break down those walls, we've got to break down those barriers. Because until we do, we are like Pharaoh, in the book of Exodus.

I've always struggled with God in the Old Testament. Growing up, I thought that God in the Old Testament hated everybody. He was so vindictive, He was so aggressively horrible! And then we have Jesus. He comes and makes everything so much nicer, so much happier. God is love! Wait, God doesn't change. So if Jesus the Son of God is love, how then do we look back at the God of the Old Testament? How do we reconcile these two?

Well through this reading of Exodus, I was looking at one of the reflections that was given to us, and it finally made sense. When we look at the Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, we hear time and time again after the plagues, that God "hardened his heart." I would look at that and say, "Well that's not just. How is that loving God created each and every one of us in his image and likeness, how is that loving?"

And finally the lightbulb came on: what our heart is made of depends on how we respond to God's love. If your heart is made of butter and you go out into the sun, what's gonna happen? It's gonna melt! If your heart is made of clay and you go out under that same sun, what's gonna happen? It's gonna harden.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart because it refused to recognize anyone but himself as god. That was Pharaoh's trouble. He couldn't trust in the Lord, because to trust in the Lord, was to say that everything that he built up, his empire and everything, where he placed himself at the primacy, as god alone, he had to reject all that. And so his heart was hardened toward the Lord because he could not allow his heart to be melted by God's love.

It made so much sense for the first time ever! God didn't punish Pharaoh, God gave him the same opportunities. In fact, He gave him ten different

opportunities through the plagues to have his heart softened. But he refused. Out of pride, out of arrogance, out of ego, out of the inability to break down those walls of his heart.

But how do we do the same thing in our lives? What walls have we put up around our own hearts? Where do we not let God in? "God I'll let you in every part of my life, except for this one part." Because if you're in here, then I have no control and that's dangerous.

I'll never forget when I was in seminary there was a priest who talked to us about tithing. (I hate talking about money, but I love this story) He said, "I went to my parish, after I got permission from the bishop, and I said, 'I want everyone in the parish to sign a contract. (he was so courageous and bold, I could never do this) that you will tithe your ten percent to the parish. If after one year you are found wanting and that ten percent that you gave to the parish has crippled you, I will reimburse the whole amount.'" Ten years later, not one person has come to him.

That my brothers and sisters is trust in the Lord. Many times, we misuse the things that we've been given in our lives. We hold them close to us because we're afraid what life is going to be like without them. The reality is *everything* that we have has been given to us by God. Every gift, every blessing, every breath of air is given to us by our Creator.

I loved a deacon's homily a couple months ago about when he went to Africa. And I use this a lot of time in homilies because I love their response to him. He asked "How can you guys go to Mass for four hours on Sunday and not just go crazy?" The response was, "Well God's blessed us with 24 hours in a day, we still have 20 to do with as we wish."

They see the blessings in their lives. We come to Mass and we say, "Okay, Father, it's been ten minutes, let's go, come on, we got stuff to do. IHOP is waiting! The Baptists are going to get out, the Lutherans are going to get out, the Methodists are going to get out, and they're going to beat us in line! We gotta get our lunch!"

The reality though is that we don't appreciate what the Eucharist is. Every time we come here, we come face to face with our Lord and Creator, the Body Blood, soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Creator of the universe Who created everything in creation and said it was good. And then created humanity, and what

was His response to humanity? He didn't say it was good, He said that it was *very* good.

The first time God ever used a qualifier was for humanity. Because He knew that we were elevated. That we were above the angels. And that then upset Satan. The whole reason Satan is who Satan is, is because God loves humanity. That He put us above the angels. That He would choose a woman to bear Him. And then elevate her to be the mother of God.

That just enrages Satan, he is so furious when we pray to Mary. Because he knows the power of those prayers. He knows it undercuts his message every time. He knows that gives us strength, that it gives us fortitude. The rosary has saved civilizations.

It's unfortunate that we do it as fast as we can to get it done. I remember, growing up, going to a parish and asking, "What is that chant that they're doing before Mass? It takes about 9 minutes. What is it that they're doing?" "That's the rosary, son." Really? When we did it at home it took about 35 minutes! It's because they weren't praying the rosary, they were doing the rosary.

We are called, my brothers and sisters, to pray to the Lord. But that takes faith which leads us to hope, which necessitates trust. But when we are clinging on to all the attachments that we have in life, it's hard for us to trust anyone, even God.

One of the great things that I've learned in these 28 days of 90, is that I really don't need a lot of those things that I'm attached to. Course, I love to watch movies, I quote them all the time, but I don't need to watch them. As much as I love to watch sports, I can just get the ticker score, and it's the same result. And my anxiety stays completely within limits. "Why did you miss that free throw? How many millions of dollars do we pay you to make a free throw?" I know I'm not the only one who's said that.

But what I'm realizing is, that by taking away all these distractions, and these attachments, it is easier to trust in God. Cause He's all that we need. How amazing it would be if we all began to shed away some of those layers that we have.

Invite God into one more place today that we didn't invite Him into yesterday, whatever that is. That's my challenge to us today. What is it that's keeping us from trusting God? Place that into the offering basket today. Not physically, because that'd be really weird. "Hey, my liver's keeping me from

...No!" But in a very imaginative way, you can visualize it, place whatever is keeping you from trusting in God into that offertory. Offer that burden before the Lord. So that when the gifts are brought forward, and we place those gifts at the foot of the altar, we can say God, I can't take care of these things by myself. Only You can bear these. Only You can fix these, mend these, whatever these, that needs to happen.

Have faith in God. Trust in Him. And that way when we come up here to receive the Eucharist we don't have any of that venom in our hearts. And all of that frustration, that anxiety.

One of the things I hear the most at McGuinness, it's crazy, but I understand it, is "Father it's so hard to pay attention at Mass." And I know that that's a struggle for everybody. It's so hard to pay attention at Mass. I understand, even sometimes, as the priest who's saying Mass, I get distracted as well. But then I realize that I'm not giving true diligence to why I'm here.

I think the reason most people go to church is for one of two reasons: Cause they don't want to go to hell - check that box off. Or because they want to get something. They want to receive something. We live in a culture today that is a gimme, gimme, gimme culture. An "I'm spiritual but not religious" culture. I want to receive, even if what I receive is junk food and will rot my teeth and rot my brain, and rot my soul.

The reality is that when we come to Mass on Sunday, our purpose is not supposed to be to receive anything. That's hard to hear, because our whole lives we're told that we come here to receive. Receive the Eucharist yes. But our sole purpose in coming to Mass, any time we come to Mass, is to give glory and praise to God. That's it. To give back to God, because He loves us. That's the whole reason we're here.

When we look at the Mass, as "I'm here to give" it helps to refocus why we come. I'm here give my heart, I'm here to give my voice, I'm here to give my life, I'm here to give my treasure, I'm here to give my talent, I'm here to give my time, I'm here to give my ALL to God. Because everything that I have comes from Him. The *least* I can do is try and focus for an hour.

"My brothers can you not stay awake for me for an hour?" Every time we read that it hits me in my heart. Because I know, in my life, I've fallen asleep in a holy hour. And I know that Jesus just kind of said "There, there, the apostles did

too.” It doesn’t hurt any less: that reality that the God of the universe, Who gave me everything is right in front of me, and I can’t focus on Him.

But it’s just like everything else in life, if I don’t prepare to give, then how am I going to give with my whole heart? How many times do I prepare to go to Mass? “Father, you know what, preparing to go to Mass, getting the kids in the car, dressed with their socks **and** shoes on – at least ten minutes before Mass starts? That’s my goal.” I understand that. I’m the second oldest of five, I know it’s hard to get kids to Mass, I understand.

But when we grow, there’s that opportunity to say, “how am I preparing throughout the week to come to Sunday Mass? Have I looked through the Scriptures? Have I looked through any meditations and reflections on the readings? Have I put any effort into what’s going to happen in this liturgy? Or am I just showing up, hoping to *get something* out of it?”

Now, if you receive something in Mass, that’s a great gift from God. It is. But remember that our first priority is to give. And it takes us giving over control of our hearts, our lives, our days, to really give to God. So may we give that control over to God today, that we seek out His grace , mercy, and at the end of the day, that we ask God to give us what we need, not just what we want.