

Homily
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fr Danny

In the past weeks we heard very specifically in the Gospel, from Jesus, that we are to love our enemies. This week, He goes a little bit further and He says, “Not only do you have to love your enemies, but you’ve got to work on yourselves as well.” Many times we’re so busy looking at the splinter in our neighbor’s eye that we don’t see that we’ve been blinded by all of these things in our lives.

We’ve all heard that phrase ‘the blind leading the blind.’ Well many times we in the church we are the blind trying to lead the blind. Because we think we know what’s best for everybody else, but then in our own lives, we don’t follow our own advice. So when Jesus calls them hypocrites, that’s what He’s saying. Most ministers, most preachers, at one time in their lives, become hypocrites. It’s so much easier for me to tell you what to do than to follow that myself.

I’ll never forget that first realization I had as a lowly associate priest just three years ago. Realizing, that I was just like the pharisees. Do what I say not what I do. I’m falling into the same trap that the Pharisees did, that His disciples did, that the apostles did. I can tell you how to live, but it is easier to say than to do.

In our lives, God is challenging us in a very specific and particular way today in this Gospel. And it’s perfect that it comes during the eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, leading up to the season of Lent that we start on Wednesday. As we journey into this Lenten season, this penitential season, it’s that opportunity to see how God is calling us into a deeper relationship with Him.

And with Lent, we’re all called to see how we can pray more, fast more, give alms more. That’s the Lenten season: to deprive ourselves of normalcy. “Well, Father, I’ve always given up chocolate for Lent.” “Not a bad thing, but why do you do that? Why do you give up chocolate?” “Well because I like it.” “Ok, but do you gorge yourself on it at Easter?” “Well yeah. Then what’s the point, what’s the purpose? Was it really a sacrifice?” “Oh believe me Father, it’s a sacrifice for me to give up chocolate!” “Ok, but do you allow it to be a life-changing sacrifice?”

Yes, it is penitential for us to give up things like chocolate, or soda, or Facebook, or social media, or things like that for Lent. But if it's not leading to purity of heart and conversion of heart, what is its ultimate purpose? That's what we're looking at when we look at Lenten sacrifices.

We're trying to whittle down those beams in our eyes. That's what Lent is all about. It's not just about giving something up, it's about whittling down those beams in our eyes, so they can become beautiful statues. That we can look at and say, it's not quite perfect yet. There're still some rough edges on that statue of my heart, so I still see through the beam in my eye.

When we look at each other, it's easy for us to point out each other's splinters. Its easy for us to tell others all the things they need to fix in their lives. But then we look in the mirror and we say, oh, I'm just fine. We have to realize that we need to look at ourselves in the mirror and see all the things we need to fix about ourselves.

That's what it means to live a devout life. To always be striving for Heaven which means to always be looking to shed from ourselves those things that we don't need. "Well, Father does that mean I have to go on a diet?" That's not what I'm talking about with shedding things that we don't need. Its not about weight. It's not about simplistic giving and giving up. It's all about how does the Lenten season really add to the conversion of our lives and the conversion of our hearts towards the love of God.

So what are those things that are standing in your way? Take that to prayer this week. And next time you come to Mass, whether it be Wednesday for Ash Wednesday Mass, or next Sunday, you can ask God to help you whittle down that beam in your eye. The ashes on Wednesday can be a reminder to us that everything that we do in this life is not for this life, but for the life to come.

How are we preparing our hearts? How are we preparing that room in our hearts as we hear in the Advent season to receive Christ in the Nativity? During the Lenten season we prepare our hearts to receive Christ in our hearts for eternity. That's what this season is about. They're both seasons of preparation, they're both seasons of penitence and repentance. They are an opportunity for us to turn to God anew.

So we'll continue to have reconciliation on Tuesdays, weather permitting, and Father's health permitting. Because we need that opportunity especially during Lent to go before our Lord and say "I failed. I'm not a failure, but I failed.

Will you have mercy on me?" And He, like that father in the Prodigal Son story, will always say, "Come to me my child, for I've slaughtered the fattened calf for you. I love you."

That's what it's all about, my brothers and sisters. Recognizing that we are sinners but we are not our sins. We are sinful, but we are not sin incarnate. We commit sins but are not bad people. For God makes no bad people. And it's through His creation of us that we were created good. Our nature foundationally is goodness, because we come from God. We come from an act of love. Between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and ultimately, our parents.

But it's really that ability to embrace our creation that Jesus is trying to lead us to in today's Gospel. So begin to investigate those beams in your eyes, and in the next few days take to prayer how you can work on whittling away some of those rough edges. And work on those during this Lenten practice, during this upcoming 45 days.

See how God is seeking to speak to your heart. Allow Him to speak to your heart. And ultimately, get out of your own way. Don't allow yourself to be blind anymore. Don't allow yourself to be led by the blind anymore. Open your eyes and see the Lord. Open your ears, hear His voice, and open your hearts. Allow Him to reside with you so that you can ultimately can reside with Him.