

Homily, 5th Sunday of Lent

4/7/19

Fr Danny

Many times, it's difficult to relate to God. It's difficult to see God as this friend that we're always told that He is. We kind of pull back to the pagan understanding about God: God is up there, we're down here, unless we do good things, God's gonna hate us, if we do bad things, He's gonna hate us even more, so we're kind of lost in that relationship with God.

At the same time, we're living in a world of the new evangelization, we're called to have a relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Called to have a relationship with God. If God is just this Divine Being overlooking everything and kind of tinkering here and tinkering there a little bit, it's hard to have a relationship with Him, right?

Today's Gospel shows more humanity in Jesus than almost any other place in the Gospels. Because of those short three words that we talk about almost every year. Because they're so profound. "And Jesus wept." He knows what it means to lose a friend. He knows what it means to lose a loved one. He's with us in our grief, in our mourning. That doesn't stop us from having that grief, or being in that mourning when we lose somebody in our lives.

We've all lost someone in our lives, whether it's a friend, a family member, distant relative. We all have those people in our lives that we lose, and in fact, just the other day, we lost another priest in our diocese. For those who didn't know, we lost Fr Paul Galletin, who's been a priest in our diocese for over 60 years, Friday evening. A little expected, but still it's difficult to lose a loved one.

I'll never forget, many of those people that have gone before me in my life. I can remember though, one moment in seminary where I kind of had a glimpse into my hopes of what is to come. And it was a scene from a movie, from one of the Narnia films.

I closed my eyes and saw this large banquet hall, with one long table. And there was an empty seat at the end. And all of my friends and loved ones who had died were sitting around this table. This occurred to me in the middle of a Holy Hour, at three o'clock in the morning.

And I'm just sitting there with my eyes closed, praying "God show me your love, show me how this actually works. And I see this banquet hall and kind of like a scene from the movie Hook (I know, another movie reference). But I see just all of this amazing things to eat, and everyone's around there, smiling, and they're all sitting in their chairs, just looking at me as I walk in the room. And they say finally, that place that He's had prepared is finally going to be filled. Our meal is finally going to start.

And when we talk about death, that's what we kind of look forward to, isn't it? Where we can be with those who have gone before us. But Jesus tells us very specifically in today's Gospel, that He is the resurrection and the Life. And when we take today's Gospel and use today's second reading from Paul to the Romans where there is no death in us, for we are spirit and the spirit doesn't die, it reminds us of our Baptism. It wasn't just Ohh, you got this water on you, a few prayers said over you... But there's so much more than that!

You were baptized into Jesus' Passion, His death, AND His resurrection. And that's beautiful. All of that is encompassed into those three words, "And Jesus wept." Many times we look at that and say, like the Jews did, "See how much he loved him."

But I think many times we get so driven based on what Scripture says, on what those three words meant for Jesus, that we rarely contemplate what He was weeping about? Cause if He knew what was going to happen, why would He weep about Lazarus' death? Was He not in fact weeping for the unbelievers, for their hearts? "I've done all these great things? Do I have to keep doing great things for you to get it? Fine! Lazarus, come out!"

Because we look at Jesus' humanity in this Gospel because it is present amongst us. Because He is weeping. He's also perturbed twice in today's Gospel. People come to me all the time "Father, I'm angry." And I say, "Welcome to being human!" Because many times anger is not the sin, it's what we do about it. It's how we justify it. It's how we release it.

Being upset about injustice is not unjust. That's actually quite just. Being upset about things we don't like, that we can't control, that's where it falls in to the wrath, the unjustified anger sometimes. But what important is that we recognize in Jesus two of those emotions He felt today. He was frustrated. And He was sad.

Those human emotions that we go through in our lives. Many times I go through them in the course of a few minutes. I'm happy, I'm upset, I'm unhappy, I'm happy. We kind of go through these ups and downs as our days go. What's important, though, is that we recognize that that's okay.

And we need to purposely and intentionally invite God to be with us with our emotions no matter what they are. If we're having a bad day, "Lord be with me because this is a horrible day. There's nothing going right, everything's going wrong! Just be with me, help me to be here, to mourn." or "Man, I got this great job, I got this great bonus!

Everything's is going great today. Lord, rejoice with me!" And every emotion in between.

To invite God to be in every moment of our lives, because whether we want Him to be here or not, through our baptism, He promised He would never leave us. That gives me hope. That helps me to recognize His love for me. It helps me to see how much He loved, but then it also doesn't stop there with those human emotions and inviting God into the life here.

Because we also are invited in our spirits. Because He is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the truth. He is the Way the Truth and the Life, which there is no end to. And by inviting Him into our lives today, we are asking Him to invite us into the life that is to come. And though we may mourn at the loss of our loved ones, and He did in today's Gospel, we know the truth. We know that death is not an ending but is just the beginning of a new chapter.

We don't like to talk about it, because we're the ones who are left behind. we're the ones who haven't experienced that yet. There's some fear, some anxiety, some consternation, some frustration, because, "God why would you take this person from me at this time in my life?" Many times that is the question that we ask. Or, "Why would you take this person from the point they were in their life, with their family and their friends?" How we see their lives.

The reality is that we are all going to die someday. And it will be a sad moment for our families. But when we die, for those of us who die in that moment, it'll be everything that we've hoped for, everything that we've longed for we will experience in that moment. And it may take pain to get there. We may be on our deathbed for weeks, months, years. But eventually that pain will cease, and joy will replace it.

Eventually that grief and that mourning will cease and the presence of God will overwhelm us.

That, my brothers and sisters, is the Good News. That as Jesus called Lazarus in his body and in his spirit to rise, we too will be raised from the dead in spirit, mind, and body. Not in these flimsy things where our eyesight goes, and our hair falls out, and our stomachs go... but all those weaknesses we have in these bodies, when we die and attain those glorious bodies, Man! I'm looking forward to it!

To quote another movie, 'cause you know that's what I do, I'll never forget the line from Forrest Gump. If you haven't seen it, it's been out for 25 years, it's your own fault. When Lt Dan has that first experience of God. He goes to church because Forrest is singing in the choir, which, Tom Hanks singing with a southern accent is just hysterical. Tom Hanks is singing as Forrest Gump, and Lt Dan is sitting there in the back in his wheelchair, and he just has this revelation. "You'll walk beside the Lord in heaven."

If you haven't seen the movie, to ruin a little bit of it, he loses his legs in the Vietnam war. And he's being told he will *walk* beside the Lord. Which tells him that any of the frailties we have in this life will be healed and made perfect. That my brothers in sisters is the good news.

If we are in pain today, the joy we will experience to come will be worth the little bit of pain we feel today. Even if it feels like it's overwhelming now. I promise you there is an end to that pain. And the end to that pain is the love of God. The end to that pain is the joy that God offers us each and every moment of each and every day.

Besides, when our loved ones go before us, they aren't gone. Their memories stay with us. But also, I've said it before and I'll say it again, because it helps me to participate more in the Mass. Other than

not showing up to Mass, being distracted in Mass is the number one sin that people confess.

Most people are distracted during Mass because we're so worried about what's coming next. The reality though, is that when we gather here as a community of faith, the WHOLE community of faith gathers here whether we are sitting here in these pews or not.

If we could see the mystical realities of what's going on around us, our beloved brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandparents, parents, friends who have gone before us, when we call upon the angels and the saints we're calling upon all of those and joining with all of those people who are in Heaven. *If we go to Heaven, we become saints!*

In that moment, as we sing the Holy, Holy, Holy, every single time we come to Mass, we are entering into a Divine reality. Sometimes I'll close my eyes, I remember last week I did it because my great aunt on my dad's side passed away last week, and I was sitting there, and I could hear her say "Danny, you put a smile on your face! I don't want to see any tears on your face today!" Sometimes that's how we treat each other. "Now you straighten up!" But I just kind of could feel her pinching me on the side of my face, saying "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!" Because sometimes that's the reality that we get.

We feel the presence of our loved ones and that's what we get to experience every time that we come to Mass. We get a glimpse into that eternal reality. So if you're going through some hard things today, know that you're not alone. People on your left and your right are as well. Come together in a community of faith, in a family. Lift each other up. Share the good news of your life, and seek the joy that only comes from God.