

I. Homily – 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 12-13, 2019

II. “As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem...”

A. We may concentrate on our Lord curing the 10 lepers, but what about our Lord? What was going on in Jesus’ life as he stopped on the road to cure them?

1. Jesus Himself was about to die and He knew it. Saint Luke doesn’t tell us Jesus’ destination simply to fill space. He mentions Jesus’ walk to Jerusalem, because he wants us to know there is some connection between Jesus curing the lepers and Jesus’ destination.

2. Jesus must have had a great deal on his mind...you know...salvation of the world concerns...not much...just that...perhaps he had some premonition of the scourging, taunting, spitting, nailing and abandoning...perhaps He was just consumed with doing what His Father asked of Him.

3. Even though Jesus certainly pondered all this in His mind...He did not hesitate to stop to help 10 lepers...in spite of knowing that most of them would not thank Him.

4. He was not just about His stuff...He always looked away from Himself to the other. This is what makes a Christian.

III. Pope Francis said, “The joy of generous giving is a barometer of the health of a Christian.” Pope Francis uttered these words not as a talk on giving more money to the church, he uttered these words in his letter on caring for the sick and dying. “The joy of generous giving is a barometer of the health of a Christian.”

A. We are faced with many important decisions throughout our lives...

1. What do I want to be when I grow up? What does God want me to be?

2. What school will I go to?

3. What job will I take?

4. Will I get married? Become a priest or a nun?

5. Who will I marry?

6. How many children will we have? Where will we live?

B. Then, there another...level of questioning arises at some point in our life...we will call this the Christian level...the level based in faith, hope and love:

1. Will I stop on my journey to Calvary? Do we care for the sick and the dying? Do we see them, even those we love, as standing in the image and likeness of God? Do we hasten death to help the one we love...or to help ourselves?
 2. These are hard questions because all of us have, are or will answer these queries either for ourselves or for one we love at some point in our lives.
- C. These questions lead us to the ultimate question. The query that comes at the end of our lives. The question that is asked at our final moment on earth: Am I ready to answer the ultimate question? Have I helped those I love to answer the last question? Do I realize that the last question I must answer on this earth is the most important?
1. What we might not realize is that the ultimate question is not just asked once at the end. No. God tries to get us ready by asking us over and over again throughout our life...the same question that he will ask in our last moment on this earth...and there is little hope that we will answer our final question differently than we answered it the first one hundred times it was asked.
 2. If the answer to God's question all my life has been "later God," "not now Lord," "too busy, God," then it is highly likely that the last time the question is asked, we will answer the same way: "Not now Lord..., later."
 3. If, however, we have been in the habit of answering "Fiat," "Let it be done to me according to your word," "speak Lord, your servant is listening," then it is highly likely we will answer the same way in our last moment... "Yes, Lord, I want you." God gives us that much freedom.

IV. Pope Francis said: "'Gift' differs from gift-giving because it entails the free gift of self and the desire to build a relationship. It is the acknowledgement of others, which is the basis of society. 'Gift' is a reflection of God's love, which culminates in the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."

- A. The answer "Yes" to the Lord is an answer that involves the entire person.
- B. Yes. I will give myself.
- C. And, it is an answer that cannot be given only once, but it must be given repeatedly...and always with the other in mind, not the self.

V. Many of you might know that I come to Saint Petronille after having been the primary caregiver for my mother for more than 2 ½ years. 7 months of that time, I was given permission by the bishop to spend exclusively caring for her.

A. When I made the decision to take those seven months away from the parish where I was, a group of young moms, school moms, three of them, came up to me and asked me, “How did your mom get you to do that?”

B. The answer was simple: “My mother always gave of herself throughout her entire life. She was constantly giving. Her whole life was taking care of us. She took care of the neighbor kids. When there was a baby in a room crying, my mother seemed to appear from no-where to inquire if she might help. She volunteered at school and church and if someone was in need she could not help herself from helping. She constantly gave.”

C. What I did not tell these moms was that she was still giving as she was sick with Alzheimer’s...they thought I was giving to her, but my gift was tiny in comparison.

1. Although she could not recognize my Dad after 61 years of marriage and 11 years as an Alzheimer’s patient, I will never forget the time my Dad was holding her hand as she slept. She woke up, looked at him and said, “And who are you?”

2. She made his day...there was something inside of her that knew she loved him even though her mind had failed her...and she let him know she still loved him.

3. Three days before she died...I will not bore you with the details...I was frantically assisting her with a procedure we had done many times before to help her with her medical condition...but this time was different...the woman who had not uttered any comprehensible word in days, perhaps weeks, said to me, “You can’t.” In other words, it is not going to work this time...you can’t save me...and, then, she said, “I see it. I see it.” I think we know what she saw. She was trying to prepare us.

4. My mother was still giving although her mind had gone...her body broken and in pain, and the Lord was about to take her to Himself...she had reached her Jerusalem.

D. When Pope Francis said, “The joy of generous giving is a barometer of the health of a Christian,” he meant that caring for the sick and dying begins with the desire to give generously.

1. When someone we love is in the battle for their life, a Christian gives.

2. When we give to someone who depends totally upon us for their care, God teaches us about our own poverty and our own need for help...we learn our need for God.

3. C.S. Lewis wrote: "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

4. God does not create evil or disease or death, because evil is the privation of good and the destruction of being...and God cannot create that which is not. Death entered the world not by God's willing it, but by sin destroying life...death is the rotten fruit of original sin.

5. What God does is take death, embrace it, allow Himself to be nailed to a cross and transforms death, this objective evil, into a passage to eternal life...God takes the greatest evil we can suffer on this earth and makes it into a passage to eternal joy so that when we lose one we love, we have the hope of eternal life...we have the hope of seeing them again.

VI. The greatest gift my mother received in her life, was given her by her parents when they taught her to pray...when they taught her that she was the beloved daughter of a loving God...when they brought her to receive our Lord in Holy Communion each Sunday.

1. My mother's parents could not have known how the gift of faith they passed on to her would be her consolation in the depth of her Alzheimer's 8 decades later. Even in her advanced Alzheimer's my mother still recognized our Lord in the Eucharist and His Blessed Mother to whom she prayed daily. These two close friends would keep the isolation of her mental condition from being complete and guard her soul from despair.

2. She was not alone in the darkness of her Alzheimer's because the two people her parents introduced her to when she was little, were still with her even when her family could not enter into the recesses of her soul.

B. When we care for the sick and the dying, we may be tempted to forget... no matter their condition...no matter their mental or physical state, this is a child of God...who has dignity and worth not because of what she is now able to accomplish...not because of the work they can do nor the jokes they can tell us nor the meals they can prepare...they have dignity and worth even in a persistent vegetative state not for the utility of their lives but because they continue to be the image and likeness of God in the depth of their being. We might say, "Well, I know that was no longer my mother or father or son or daughter...but, God continues to recognize that person for who they truly continue to be...he remains with them and He exhorts us to remain with them...care for them and love them.

C. My friends, we do not believe a human being is more valuable, because they can do stuff...this is utilitarianism...a Christian believes a human being has worth by the simple fact that they are created in God's image and likeness and always will be no matter their state. Your life is not worth more because you have a house or make more money or have more degrees...your life has the same value as my bed-ridden mother and every individual at Atria or Belmont Village or Brookdale or Central DuPage Hospital, because you and they were created by God with an immortal soul.

D. This is why it is never morally permissible to withhold food and water from a terminally ill patient...even one that is incapacitated. Nutrition and Hydration are ordinary means of sustaining life...not extraordinary means.

E. This is why we send for the priest to administer the Sacraments even when the person cannot speak or hear or respond.

F. This is why we sit, hold the hand of and speak to the one we love, even when they are sleeping or unconscious.

VII. Pope Francis wrote: "Each of us is poor, needy and destitute. When we are born, we require the care of our parents to survive, and at every stage of life we remain in some way dependent on the help of others. We will always be conscious of our limitations, as "creatures", before other individuals and situations. A frank acknowledgement of this truth keeps us humble and spurs us to practice solidarity as an essential virtue in life."

VIII. Jesus gathered all those in need, the physically and spiritually sick, on the top of a mountain and told them blessed are those who mourn...but then He ascended another mountain to die on a cross so that death and sorrow would be turned into eternal life and joy.

IX. When the Lord cured the sick and raised the dead, He revealed His identity and purpose...life and joy.

X. When someone in our sphere suffers sorrow and sickness or death, God gives us the opportunity to love in a way we have not yet loved...to give as He gave without bounds...and if we do this, if we are in the habit of giving generously of ourselves, the answer to our last question in life will invariably be, "Yes, Lord, I want to be with you forever."