

Homily - November 22, 2020 – Christ the King

I am going to start this morning by getting you all to think back to the time when you were preparing for your first reconciliation. For some of us , it will be quite a while ago, and for others, perhaps it is fairly recently. I know for me, it was so long ago that it wasn't even called Reconciliation. It was the Sacrament of Penance or Confession.

I remember being so nervous; also a little embarrassed to be telling the priest I served mass for, the terrible things I had done in my 8 years on this planet. But most importantly (and I think this is a huge gift of this sacrament), I was feeling humbled. Not many things will do a better job of stopping you from getting (as my mother used to say) "too big for your britches" than staring face-to-face at your own sin.

I remember having my intro memorized: "Bless me Father for I have sinned and this is my first confession." This was actually my first formal confession, as I had been forced by my older siblings to confess many times at home to crimes I did not commit. Nevertheless, there I was with my list of transgressions for which I was seeking forgiveness. I have to take a minute here and tell you that my first confessor was a small, gentle, elderly priest named Fr. Emery Doucet, who had more faith in his little finger than I think I have in my entire person. The experience could not have been better.

So, now I have my formula for confession; introductory line, list of sins, absolution, perhaps a small penance, and off I go to start all over again. As I got older, this just didn't seem to be enough. Was God really that concerned with how many times I swore that week, or yelled at someone or maybe thought something I shouldn't have? Then, in recent years, I had an epiphany. While yes, I do indeed have to be responsible for my actions, my sin is probably more defined by my inaction. My failure to use the gifts God has given me to help those that were put in my path. That, for me, is the challenge of today's Gospel. We are reminded that what we don't do can leave far deeper wounds than our actions.

We will be entering the season of Advent next week and a dominant theme in Advent is to keep awake. Well, that challenge is not just for Advent; it's for every day of our lives. I recently was facilitating an R.C.I.A. session and we were looking

at this morning's Gospel. I started the meeting by saying: "Everyone wants to know what they have to do to go to heaven. Well, pay attention, I am about to read you the answer."

How many times do we miss an opportunity to bring sunshine to somebody's rainy day? Jesus gives us some extreme examples here to which most of us would say, "I would do that." After all, who wouldn't give food to someone they saw starving; or a drink to someone thirsty; clothes to someone naked and so on? But, for us, it's the so called small, everyday occasions that can give us trouble. A couple of examples if I may:

Have you ever been standing in a line up at the grocery store, pharmacy, hardware store...that seems to be taking forever. You are pressed for time, and the more you check your phone to see what time it is, the more your frustration level rises. Finally, you are at the front of the line and one-on-one with the cashier. You have two options now; you can really go aboard them for how inefficient the cash system is; how there should be more people on duty and whatever else you can come up with that at the end of the day is not their fault. Or you can offer a kind word of encouragement and a wish for them to have a great day. I spent 30 years working in retail before coming to work for the church and I can tell you; that cashier is as upset about your long wait as you are. The only difference is they can't vent their anger to you or anyone else. They at that moment are at your mercy.

"I was naked and you clothed me."

Example #2:

In this time of technology, there is not one of us, I don't think, that doesn't have caller ID on their phone. How many times have you had your phone ring, looked at the screen, and let out a gasp of exasperation while saying, "I don't have the time or the patience for them right now."? Perhaps it's someone who is constantly in need of your help; or someone who is nice enough but just talks forever. Or maybe, it's that person who is so

negative about everything and your already having a challenging enough day. Take a deep breath, and consider this: Perhaps the person who is calling is struggling mightily in their own life, and just needs an ear to bend for a bit. They call you because you provide for them an escape, albeit temporary, from the pain or turmoil that is their life.

"I was in prison and you visited me"

The ever illusive "they" say we are living in a culture where it is all about "ME". I have my rights; you won't tell me I have to wear a mask; you won't tell me that I can't choose when I die; etc., etc.... But Jesus tells us that it's all about the "other". If I can use an analogy here that really brings this home for me. When you first fall in love, it is all about the other. It's about caring for them, protecting them, providing for their needs. I believe, it's love in its purest form and that's why Jesus compares God's love for the church to the love between a bride and groom.

You and I will have an impact on every person we meet. Whether it's good or bad is kind of up to us. If we can do what we are challenged to do this morning, which is to see Jesus in the least of those among us; to use whatever God-given gifts we have in service to them and, above all else, to respect and keep intact their dignity, then the kingdom Jesus speaks of is truly at hand.

I would like to close with a story that speaks to the dignity of the other:

This is a story from Katherine Hepburn:

"Once when I was a teenager, my father and I were standing in line to buy tickets for the circus.

Finally, there was only one other family between us and the ticket counter. This family made a big impression on me.

There were eight children, all probably under the age of 12. The way they were dressed, you could tell they didn't have a lot of money, but their clothes were neat and clean.

The children were well-behaved, all of them standing in line, two-by-two behind their parents, holding hands. They were excitedly jabbering about the clowns, animals, and all the acts they would be seeing that night. By their excitement you could sense they had never been to the circus before. It would be a highlight of their lives.

The father and mother were at the head of the pack standing proud as could be. The mother was holding her husband's hand, looking up at him as if to say, "You're my knight in shining armor." He was smiling and enjoying seeing his family happy.

The ticket lady asked the man how many tickets he wanted? He proudly responded, "I'd like to buy eight children's tickets and two adult tickets, so I can take my family to the circus." The ticket lady stated the price.

The man's wife let go of his hand, her head dropped, the man's lip began to quiver. Then he leaned a little closer and asked, "How much did you say?" The ticket lady again stated the price.

The man didn't have enough money. How was he supposed to turn and tell his eight kids that he didn't have enough money to take them to the circus? Seeing what was going on, my dad reached into his pocket, pulled out a \$20 bill, and then dropped it on the ground. (We were not wealthy in any sense of the word!) My father bent down, picked up the \$20 bill, tapped the man on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, sir, this fell out of your pocket."

The man understood what was going on. He wasn't begging for a handout but certainly appreciated the help in a desperate, heartbreaking and embarrassing situation.

He looked straight into my dad's eyes, took my dad's hand in both of his, squeezed tightly onto the \$20 bill, and with his lip quivering and a tear streaming down his cheek, he replied; "Thank you, thank you, sir. This really means a lot to me and my family."

My father and I went back to our car and drove home. The \$20 that my dad gave away is what we were going to buy our own tickets with. Although we didn't get to see the circus that night, we both felt a joy inside us that was far greater than seeing the circus could ever provide.

That day I learnt the value to Give.

The Giver is bigger than the Receiver. If you want to be large, larger than life, learn to Give. Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get - only with what you are expecting to give - which is everything.

The importance of giving, blessing others can never be over emphasized because there's always joy in giving. Learn to make someone happy by acts of giving."

Mark Mahoney