

SEPTEMBER 3, 2017

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

READING 1 JER 20:7-9

RESPONSORIAL PSALM PS 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. (2b) My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

READING 2 ROM 12:1-2

GOSPEL MT 16:21-27

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

HOMILY:

According to the third annual Chapman University Survey of American Fears in 2016 (I didn't know there was a 2nd annual survey!), the top 10 causes of paralyzing fear were:

- Corruption of government officials (same top fear as 2015) — 60.6%
- Terrorist attacks — 41%
- Not having enough money for the future — 39.9%
- Being a victim of terror — 38.5%
- Government restrictions on firearms and ammunition — 38.5%
- People I love dying — 38.1%
- Economic or financial collapse — 37.5%
- Identity theft — 37.1%
- People I love becoming seriously ill — 35.9%
- The Affordable Health Care Act/"Obamacare" — 35.5%

As it turns out, even our psyches are not free of politics!

It was to none of these fears that Pope Francis spoke at World Youth Day last summer when he spoke of this fear that induced the most paralysis of fear: **the sofa**. Pope Francis said: "But in life there is another, even more dangerous, kind of paralysis. It is not easy to put our finger on it. I like to describe it as the paralysis that comes from confusing happiness with a sofa. In other words, to think that in order to be happy all we need is a good sofa. A sofa that makes us feel comfortable, calm, safe. . . A sofa that keeps us safe from any kind of pain and fear. A sofa that allows us to stay home without needing to work at, or worry about, anything. "Sofa-happiness"! That is probably the most harmful and insidious form of paralysis, which can cause the greatest harm to young people. And why does this happen Father? Because, little by little, without even realizing it, we start to nod off, to grow drowsy and dull. . . . The truth, though, is something else. Dear young people, we didn't come into this world to "vegetate", to take it easy, to make our lives a comfortable sofa to fall asleep on. . . . My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk, he is the Lord of the eternal "more". Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus

demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths. To blaze trails that open up new horizons capable of spreading joy, the joy that is born of God's love and wells up in your hearts with every act of mercy. To take the path of the "craziness" of our God, who teaches us to encounter him in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the friend in trouble, the prisoner, the refugee and the migrant, and our neighbors who feel abandoned. . . . In all the settings in which you find yourselves, God's love invites you bring the Good News, making of your own lives a gift to him and to others. This means being courageous, this means being free! [Pope Francis, World Youth Day, Kraków, 2016]

For Francis, the paralysis of inactivity, the paralysis of the "couch potato" is for him the most terrifying, in that the stakes are high: life is in the balance. Over time, the sofa symbolizes mere consumption, receiving rather than giving, resting rather than serving, isolating rather than loving. But the terror of the couch is only seen looking back: how much life was wasted in a state of semi-sleep! Well, the past is gone—but what about what precious life is still before us?

This is the battle underway in today's gospel. Jesus is leading the way, the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice, the way of laying down one's life, never on a sofa, but in the field of service. St. Peter reacts against this heroic love: "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you!" In other words: Don't love that far, don't sacrifice that much, don't go that far. In Pope Francis' words: Take it easy, take a seat on the sofa and relax! To which the fierce love of God in Jesus replies to St. Peter's temptation away from the sacrificial love of the cross: "Get behind me, Satan! Or in modern terms: put down the remote and get off the sofa. We've got some sacrificial loving to do! For the voice of Jesus says: "do not serve yourselves, but serve me and my people, and enter into life." To our youth, the question then posed by Christ and the gospel is the same as it has been to each generation of believers: not, what do I want to do, but what would Christ have me do and who would Christ have me serve? And to all of us, at any stage of life, the same question presses on our hearts: "what would Christ have me do?" With my family, with my friends, with my coworkers, with the those with whom I disagree, with the angry and rude driver on the road, with everyone I meet: "what would Christ have me do?" It's never too late to serve God, it's never too late to begin again, to love God and love neighbor! Our mission is an awesome, costly, yet exhilarating one: by our words and actions, to cease our serving ourselves and instead follow the example of disciples before us, to take up the cross of Jesus, to follow in his footsteps, to get up and step up and make a sacrifice for others, to live completely and fully!!

Enough of a tepid, lukewarm, sofa-existence. It's time to get up, to rise up and love and live—it's time to bear Christ's cross, his astonishing way to life in its fullness! Politicians are scary. Terrorists are scary. Economic collapse is scary. Spiders are scary. But, as it turns out, nothing is as scary as the sofa: a life lived in leisure, on the sidelines, while there is loving, living, and laying down our lives for others to be done. Our next trip to the couch is our occasion to ask: is there more living to be done? The Lord of "the risk," the Lord of "more" indeed has created us for so much more. The cross of Jesus teaches: this is the way to a life well-lived. There is nothing scarier than looking back on a life not well-lived. Lord, move our hearts off the sofa and to the cross—denying ourselves at every moment to give life to others. Along Jesus' royal road of the cross, that's not scary—that's living!