

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 4/5, 2021 – Reflection

The Carter Heights Golf Course spreads its layout over the rolling hills just outside of Corry, PA. In the small clubhouse, there are a number of plaques that memorialize several important accomplishments at the golf club. On one you can see the name of every player who has ever made a hole-in-one on the course, including the name of my cousin Howie who did it years ago while I watched. There's also a plaque dedicated to the memory of the founder and first owner of the course who brought golf to the rural countryside outside of town. At the tee box on every hole, there hangs a plaque that gives the number of the hole, its yardage and par, and the company or business that sponsors the hole. And believe it or not, I have a sign on the course that is dedicated to me! The 5<sup>th</sup> hole at Carter Heights is the longest on the course, with a narrow fairway bounded on both sides by woods leading to an impossibly sloped green that is a nightmare to putt. My sign is just off the left side of the fairway, heading into the woods where I often deposit my tee shot. The sign, that is my own personal sign reads: "POISON IVY - KEEP OUT!"

Have you ever had the sublime pleasure of having poison ivy? If you've encountered the plant or even breathed it in the air, the ordeal starts out as a big nothing ... just one little pustule, a tiny inconsequential pimple, that itches out of all proportion to its minute size. Before you know it, with every scratch, the rash spreads ... eyes, mouth, groin ... until you can do real and lasting damage.

In his talk last week, Deacon Ron spoke some of sin. He used the list of evils that come from within a person Jesus spoke of in St. Mark's gospel: "evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly." He spoke of the need to get things right with God in prayer and in the Sacrament of Penance. But he also said that almost all of us are good people and that we don't really think we're all that bad, that we're big sinners, that Jesus' list of deadly sins applies to me! I mean really, I haven't killed anybody or robbed a bank or been a sex trafficker or claimed to be God ... what do I need to confess??

Lemme take you back to that 5<sup>th</sup> hole at Carter Heights, the one with MY sign about the poison ivy. I often hit errant shots that end up in the woods on that hole, but the situation only gets worse, the error spreads, if I try to cover my mistake and play out of trouble.

Think of a little thing like a tidbit of gossip. When you say something about somebody else, it's really no big deal, just a little story, a little bit of news, and if what you say isn't the most positive thing, well, you're not murdering anybody! But, when you start a story, you drag in another person to listen, and sure as we're sittin' here, they'll take the same story to another and another and another. That little pimple of gossip spreads from one tongue to another and another and another, until real damage is done to the good name of the person who the story was about in the first place.

Little faults, little sins are no big deal, like a little three-leaf ivy plant is no big deal ... until it is!

Bring your sins, even the little venial ones, to the Sacrament of God's Healing Forgiveness and put things right. Are you scared? Remember, "Thus says the Lord:

Say to those whose hearts are frightened:

Be strong, fear not!

Here is your God,

He comes with vindication;

With divine recompense He comes to save you!"

Why persist in staying in the weeds when you could dwell in the verdant pastures of the Lord, our Good Shepherd?!!