October 13, 2019: Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

While going to school at Catholic University of America in Washington DC, I was once asked to celebrate Mass in one of the dorms. I was happy to oblige, but something problematic happened during the celebration concerning my cellphone. I almost always have my cellphone on vibrate mode, partly because the sound of a ringing phone tends to irritate me, not just in Mass, but in general the sound is pretty annoying to me. I am also not really a fan of musical rings or other types of noise that people use. And so, my phone stays on vibrate mode unless it is absolutely necessary to have the ringer on, such as when I’m on hospital duty.

Well, this particular day as I began to pray the Eucharistic Prayer, my phone started *not* to vibrate, but to ring, and the volume was all the way up. It was impossible in that small room for people *not* to hear it. The problem was that the alb I was wearing did not have any slits in the sides, and so it was impossible to get to my phone. It simply had to keep ringing until it went to voice mail. Normally a situation like this might be embarrassing, but honestly, the bigger problem I had was *not* laughing. It was simply so awkward a situation that it was more amusing than embarrassing. I had assumed the phone was set on vibrate mode—the way it almost always is—and of course, we all know what happens when one assumes.

Assumptions are something each and every one of us does in our lives. We make big assumptions and small assumptions all the time. And usually we do so based on the information we have, or how situations or circumstances generally play out. We know what the expected results or decisions should look like. The problem is that when we make our decisions based on assumptions, things *can* go very wrong.

We see this in the context of relationships all the time. When I am working with couples preparing for marriage and we talk about good communication, one of the things I warn them against is making assumptions. I am very clear on this point. I usually say something along the lines of, “Once you start assuming, you have stopped communicating.” And this can happen in many different ways. One person assumes the other should know what they are thinking or feeling. And they generally get upset when the other does not respond in accord with their assumption. The reality is that no matter how long people have been together no one will ever be 100% perceptive about the other. The reality is that we all look at the world through a variety of different lenses at the same time. As such, it is not always possible to predict which lenses we are looking through at any particular moment.

Good communication requires *no* assumptions at all. You lay out the issue definitively and clearly. What are you thinking? What are you feeling? How did this impact you? What memories does this bring forward? And so forth. A truly empathetic and intuitive person may be able to put together some of the pieces, but surely not all of them. And based on our assumptions, our dialogue can quickly go off the rails if the person is not responding as we expect and need them to. Of course, the issue is always with the other. They should know or better understand the issues, but instead they are just being closed to the issues that are important to you. They need to step up to the plate and recognize that they are not responding in the way you need them to. It must mean that they do not love you or they would surely understand what you need from them.

How often we can get this way with God. We have our assumptions and expectations for who God is and how He should react. We know what is best for us in a given situation, and so God should simply answer in the way we have determined He should. If things do not go according to our plans, then it must certainly mean that God does not hear us: He is not responding to us. Possibly God does not love me, or He would give me what I know is best for me.

How easily we fall into the trap of knowing what is best for our lives. We understand best that which will give us true happiness and meaning in our lives. We know ourselves better than anyone else. We know what our hopes, desires and dreams are. We know what our true talents are and how to make the best use of them.

However, much of the time we are wrong, and *that’s* our problem. The reality is that there is only One who really knows us, and that is God. God alone understands our true gifts and potential. God alone knows what will bring us true joy and happiness. God alone has the answers we really need. God makes no assumptions. He created us and knows why He created us. God can read our heart in a way we cannot.
Our conversation with the Lord should not be about convincing Him to give us what we think we need, but rather, it should be about discovering from Him what we truly need.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian