October 27, 2019: Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Halloween that I was in second grade, my brothers and I were outside wrestling and chasing each other around. We were simply filling in time while we waited to go trick-or-treating. I must admit that I loved trick-or-treating as a kid. It was not so much about dressing up in a costume—that was never really important to me. In fact, much of the time it was a struggle to determine what my costume should be. Rather, it was about all the free candy we got. I really loved candy as a kid.

So, this particular Halloween, as we were running around and one of my brothers was chasing me, I decided to run into the house. We had a screen door that had a glass piece in the middle section. As I opened the door, I managed to put my hand right through the glass window. It immediately started bleeding. My Mom was not home at the time and so my brothers took me to the next-door neighbor, Mrs. Beasley. Honestly, she was no help at all! At the sight of the blood, she panicked and was in a worse state than my brothers. My oldest brother, Billy, took over and got my hand wrapped in a towel in such a way that it slowed down the bleeding, and that’s when my Mom got home. She, of course, immediately took me to the hospital. I was pretty upset at that point, not so much about having to go to the hospital, but because it meant no trick-or-treating for me.

When we returned home from the hospital after getting several stitches (the cut was actually pretty deep), I discovered something really cool. My sister Anne, who originally was not going trick-or-treating that year because she felt she was too old, had gone for me. When she got the candy, she explained to people, “My stupid brother had to go to the hospital for stitches, so I’m getting candy for him.” It must have been the most candy I ever received on a Halloween. It was pretty awesome for me.

How often has that happened in our life that a bad situation turned out very differently because of what someone else did for us. Anne did not need to go trick-or-treating for me but because she did, what was going to be my worst Halloween became my best. Remember that, for me, it was all about the candy. I recognize in the giant scheme of things, getting more candy is not really important, but you get the overall point.

The real point is that we can make a difference in people’s lives, depending on how we choose to act. It is not about waiting for people to seek our help, but about stepping in when we recognize we can make a real difference. We simply need to look at the parable of the Good Samaritan. He saw someone in trouble and, unlike the others, he did not simply walk on by. Instead, in his compassion he stepped in where help was needed. He was not asked to do anything, but he assessed the situation and determined what he could do to help, and he did it. We simply need to look to Jesus on the cross. Jesus realized that there was only one way to change the terrible trajectory that humanity was heading toward. We could not fix our own problems. We could not get into heaven on our own. We were in a situation where there was only one person who could fix our problems. And so, Jesus took on our sins—our brokenness—and nailed them to the cross. He did this in order to make it possible for us to live our lives with God for all eternity. If Jesus had made the decision not to act, or to wait until we asked, then we would have been lost forever. Instead, Jesus chose to act with compassion and free us from the power of sin and death.

The actions we take can make a real difference in the lives of others. We can so easily forget that we are our brother’s keeper. We have a deep and personal responsibility for others, and not just for those who are part of our circle of family and friends. The Good Samaritan did not know the man he stopped to help. He helped him anyway. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man chose not to help Lazarus in his need, and it brought about the rich man’s damnation. Compassion is not really an option for us, and our compassion cannot be limited by any constraints. We are called to unconditionally care for every single human being. And we are not allowed to look simply to our own first. The essential point of the story of the Good Samaritan is that every person is our neighbor and requires our support.
The reality is that when we choose to act in the lives of others, particularly when it is not asked for and is unexpected, amazing things can happen. When we are willing to live our lives as the Good Samaritan did, we will be living our lives as instruments of Christ. We become an instrument of his mercy, love, compassion, and healing presence. In a real way we bring the cross and resurrection directly into the lives of others. It is the greatest gift we can possibly give to another. Be that unexpected gift of Christ’s compassion to others.

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