February 24th, 2019: Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

Last weekend I gave a homily that was very difficult for me to preach. In fact, I argued with God about whether or not it was really necessary or appropriate. I asked Him if there was another way to present his message of hope, but God was very clear to me: no, there was no other way—this is what He wanted. It was a struggle at each Mass for me to present his message but I did what the Lord wanted.

For those of you who were not at any of my Masses, the message was about my inner struggle over the last several weeks concerning all of the issues facing the collaborative, such as: money problems, changes being presented about the faith formation program, and many others. I did not go into explicit details about each of the issues, but focused on a thought that kept popping into my head at random times. My thought was, “You are a failure!” There was no rhyme or reason for when this would happen, and in time I came to feel a sense of despair. It finally came to a head one day while I was driving and praying the rosary; this same thought popped into my head once more, and in that moment I knew how to respond. I asked simply, “Where is the hope?” If the message was from God there would be hope attached to it. It became clear to me where the thought was coming from—the evil one! Then, I was able to recognize my real problem: I was too inwardly directed and had lost real perspective... God is ultimately in charge. So, when the moment is too big—too overwhelming—it is about letting go and letting God be God!

As I just told someone, I am a very private person. I do not have a problem sharing stories of my life, but to open up about my inner struggles is not something that is very comfortable for me. And yet that is exactly where God is bringing me right now. My biggest inner struggle is not allowing the fear of failure to overtake me. It is probably my biggest fear, and acknowledging this is both freeing and terrifying at the same time. Like most people, I find it more comfortable keeping such thoughts at the periphery. But God is forcing me to focus on my fear of failure, in order to challenge me to change.

What is the real change God desires of me? Humility! I recognize now why God forced me to give this homily: it was a truly humbling experience that... well, honestly, brought me closer to Him. I must also admit that I was very annoyed with God and said some things to Him that I probably should not have said. But God understands and fortunately—for us—is very patient. He is, of course, unconditional love and always leads us to our true self if we allow Him to do so. God simply wants me to get rid of all that is preventing me from being the person He desires me to be.

As part of that desire, God is bringing me out of my comfort zone and forcing me to face what needs to be addressed. It is not an easy process, but in the long run will open me to my true nature—being made in the image and likeness of God. It will help me to embrace more fully and completely my baptismal and ordination calling to follow Christ and be Christ to others.

The only real failure in life is remaining in place, out of fear. The only real failure is not allowing God to transform us from our broken and sinful ways into the person He sees within us. The only real failure is staying in our comfort zone out of fear of where it may lead us.

Failure is not about trying and not succeeding; it is about not succeeding and then giving up. My calling to be your pastor is one of the greatest joys of my life. However, the challenges I am called to confront in serving these two communities can at times be daunting. But I must recognize that whatever challenges come before us, it is not all about me. Rather, it is about us and how we as a community will address those challenges. My job is not to come up with all the answers, but rather, to find the best way to present the issues and to work together with all of you to resolve them.
Ultimately, the lesson God is teaching me is how to grow more deeply in humility. It is something He has been working on my whole life, but most powerfully in the last couple of years. As God has called me out of my comfort zone to better serve His people, He is doing the same for you. What is your biggest fear? What is your greatest struggle? Don’t be afraid to confront God with your fears... with God all things are possible. He will help you to grow into the person you can be, and it will be worth whatever struggles you may have to face.

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