March 10, 2019: First Sunday of Lent

As I was getting ready to leave church last Sunday, I saw a mom with her young son at the door of the church getting ready to leave. The son had put his hand in the holy water font and went to bless himself. It was clear that he was still learning how to do this. The mom was so patient with him as he tried to remember the right order of making the sign of the cross and saying the accompanying words. She showed him what to do by doing it herself slowly. The boy tried so hard to do it just the same way. You could tell it was a struggle for him, but eventually he got it right.

Passing on the faith is really the most important thing that a parent does. As I have said before, a parent’s primary role in his or her child’s life is to get them to heaven. And children come to know what to do by imitating their parents. I know a big part of my relationship with God came from watching my parents. Much of what I learned—how to speak, walk, eat on my own, and so forth—came from following their lead. Raising children is such a tremendous responsibility but, at the time, a wonderful gift. God has entrusted you with his creation in order for you to lead the way to Him.

As the primary teachers of the faith in the life of your child, you take on a role like that of Mary and Joseph with Jesus. Jesus as an infant, in his humanity, obviously did not know who He was or what was expected of Him. But we are told that “Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.” He developed his understanding about life, faith, and God by watching how Mary and Joseph lived out their faith. He came to know how to pray, He learned how to read and understand the scriptures, and He came to seek God the Father’s will for his life. He learned all of this from watching how Mary and Joseph lived their lives. In the scriptures, we read how important prayer and the scriptures were to Christ.

When Jesus goes into the desert He goes there to pray. He wants time to be with God, to understand what exactly his mission will be. He wants to understand the way—the path the Father has planned for Him. Jesus is not interested in looking to his own sense of fulfillment; rather, He wants to ensure that He follows the way God has mapped out for Him. And that is exactly what we see both Mary and Joseph do when confronted with God’s will. Mary simply responded, “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.” And when Joseph was ready to divorce Mary, God sent an angel to him in a dream with the message to take Mary into his home. He did just that because he was an upright and righteous man. The very example of their lives led Jesus into the desert to seek an understanding of his call—his vocation.

While in the desert, the devil challenged Jesus with three temptations. He tried to warp the meaning of scripture in order to lead Him away from God, but Jesus responded with the true meaning of scripture. How was He able to do this so easily? The Gospel of Luke tells us, “He came to Nazareth, where He had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.” Jesus’ parents brought Him up to worship God and to make use of the scriptures, to understand the way of life we are all called to live. Jesus could resist the temptations of the devil and the world because his parents gave Him the tools to do just that. They showed Him that the way of salvation is only possible by fulfilling the will of God.

The example that Mary and Joseph lived out helped Jesus to understand who He really was. It was not about what his parents wanted for Him, but rather, about the life God had planned for Him. And ultimately that is what Lent is about. Lent is a tool to help us seek to understand God’s will for our lives. It is about embracing that fundamental truth that, though we might have our parents’ DNA, we are made in the image and likeness of God.

Each of us needs to discover just what it means personally to be the image and likeness of God in the world. It is about being ready for the challenges that the world and the devil may throw at us. It is about recognizing that temptations are real and that they can easily distort the truth—to make it sound plausible. It is about being open by the grace of God to respond with the truth of faith, as Jesus did.
It all begins with the simplest lesson: a mom with her child at the door of the church—one showing how, and the other, learning by imitation. A child imitates his or her parent(s) and thus discovers the way to God.

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,

[Signature]

Fr. Brian