April 14, 2019: Palm Sunday of The Lord’s Passion

As I was driving down Davis Road in Chelmsford, I saw someone feeding the horse and the cow. It’s fascinating to watch how people react to those two animals. It is not unusual to see people feeding them, petting them, taking pictures of them, and other things they do. There seems to be something magnetic about these two animals. I have to admit that every time I drive by, I am always looking to see where they are and what they are doing. Even though I have never stopped to interact with them, I still feel connected to them by seeing them almost every day. The connection is, of course, not the same as with people or domestic pets, like my cats who I engage with each day. Those connections have a far deeper and more important impact on our lives.

Making connections is such an important part of what it means to be human. We are not intended to be an island. We are made in the image and likeness of God, and God is Trinity: three in one. At the very core of His nature God is community—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is always engaged with the other; they are always in communion. If we are made in the image and likeness of God, then we are social beings at the very core of our nature. Hence, we need to create real relationships with other people. I believe, in this day and age, it is harder to do that. All forms of communication we have: email, texting, and the various social apps such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, etc., were intended to make communication better but have actually done the exact opposite. We might know what people are doing at every moment, but that does not mean we understand what is actually going on in their lives. Most people do a good job of curating what they show to others. In this case, they are showing us only what they want us to see as opposed to what their life is actually like. This is one of the reasons we are feeling less connected to the people in our lives.

The church is one of the places where we should be able to create relationships that will help us feel less isolated. But, for that to happen each of us has to make the decision that we are going to be ambassadors for Christ. What does that mean? It means that we should be greeting people as they come into the church. When they come into our pew, we need to say ‘hi’ to them. If you don’t know each other’s names, introduce yourselves. How often people have asked me, “Do you know what happened to the person who always sits in the first (or any other) pew?” They will then tell me what the person looks like and how long he or she has been gone. But they don’t know their name! I am supposed to know this person based on what Mass they attend, pew placement, and a description; it does not really help me. We have a chance to create a deeper sense of community by doing such a little thing as saying hi and asking a name.

I know as a New Englander that we like to hold true to what Robert Frost wrote: “Good fences make good neighbors.” We like our boundaries and keeping our distances. But to truly make our Church a welcoming place, we need to get out of our comfort zone. We need to be willing to reach out to people. People in our society feel so disconnected and we need to change that. Personal contact is the most important way to connect with people. Eye contact and a smile go a long way to help people know that they are being invited to belong.

This week we will have an opportunity to help people feel like they belong here. And the person in the pew will be Jesus’ most important ambassador. We will see people who do not necessarily come to church on a regular basis. It is our responsibility to make them feel wanted. If they are sitting in your seat don’t make a big deal about it. It is not about where we sit but who we sit with: the person who just walked through the door should be Jesus to us. Let us treat each person who comes in as we would treat Jesus.

It does not matter how long it has been since we have seen them. What matters is that this day they have chosen to come and celebrate with us. It does not matter if they don’t know exactly what to do. Rather, it is an opportunity for us to help them feel comfortable and show them the way. It does not matter if they are not as engaged as we think they should be. It is an opportunity to simply be an example by our own engagement. In Christ we are expected to be hospitable to the person who shows up. We are not here to judge them because they do not come as much as we do. We are not here to judge them because their
children might be noisy. We are not here to judge them by how they are dressed or by their deportment. We are not here to judge anything about the person who walks through the door to join us in prayer.

Christ has one expectation of us when the person walks through the door: that we make known, by our actions, that Christ is here and Christ says welcome. Please be the welcome of Christ.

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