August 18, 2019: Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

While on vacation I did something really stupid. I wear contact lenses and every so often they will dry out in my eye. At that point I simply take out the bothersome contact, throw it away, and put in a new one. One morning my left contact went bad, and so I decided it was probably a good idea to switch out both contacts because the right one would probably go soon. The left contact went in with no problem, but when I put the right contact in, I could hardly see—everything was blurry! Figuring that there was something wrong with the contact—which happens every so often—I took it out and placed a new one in my eye. The same exact thing happened again. It made me wonder if this was a bad batch of contacts, but that had never happened before. It seemed to make sense to open a different box of contacts, but as I opened the new individual contact it became clear what the problem was. The original contact was still in my eye! I cannot tell you how stupid I felt, but at the same time the situation cracked me up and I had to laugh out loud. It really was pretty funny.

I realized that the original contact was still in my eye because everything became clear as soon as I took out the new contact. If we think about life, how often our choices can make situations worse or, in a sense, blurrier. We believe we have the solution to a problem, and yet, as we put our plan into action things can go awry. And much of the time we simply continue down the same path without realizing what the issue really is. We try to adjust our approach, or we try to correct what we think is wrong. But the real problem is that we never stop and look at what might be the underlying issues that are the real cause of things not working out as we think they should.

In my own life when things are not going according to plan, I usually discover that my thought process was wrong all along. It normally comes down to something I preached on a while back, and that I teach in my Liturgy and Sacraments class—about our being called to full, active, and conscious participation in both the liturgy and our lives.

The very nature of the liturgy is intended to lead to the full, active, and conscious participation of the people of God. The heart of the liturgy is about engaging in a dialogue with the Lord in order for Him to lead us on the path of salvation. The biggest obstacle to full, active, and conscious participation has nothing to do with the ritual expression of liturgy. It has to do with the reality that most people are not fully engaged in their own lives. The main issue is that most people do not even realize this discrepancy. As Christians, life is defined in how we come into relationship with Christ, for Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

Most people compartmentalize their lives and therefore separate out the issues they believe have nothing to do with God. They determine what is a faith question and what is not. They create a fake dichotomy in their lives and believe that there are issues that have nothing to do with their faith and God. They come to rely solely on themselves for fundamental issues in their lives, and this mode of operation begins to make their outlook blurry. It is like putting a second contact lens in our eyes. We try to depend on our own ability to make decisions, which quite frankly we cannot do well.

And yet, that is not how Christ lived his life. Every aspect of Jesus’ life—every choice and word He spoke—was centered on and grounded in the will of the Father. Christ lived a life that was fully engaged. Every time we choose to separate our words and actions from God, we become disengaged from living our lives to the fullest. What makes this even more of a challenge is that most people do not understand themselves well enough to recognize the futility of how they make choices. We are either choosing to live in freedom or slavery. Freedom exists only when we choose God’s will. Slavery is the result of every other choice we make that leads us down the path away from God. The longer we go down that path, the more disengaged we become from life itself—Christ.

The necessary disposition of the Christian begins with recognizing that we are wholly and completely dependent upon God. We cannot accomplish anything of value without God’s grace, and with humble submission we open ourselves in obedience, to and with Christ, to praise and worship God. We need to recognize that every choice we make must lead to the praise and worship of God. If our choice does not do this, then we have a made a bad choice, a choice not centered in Christ.

Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” They gave various responses, and then Jesus asked the all-important question, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus made clear that this answer did not come from Peter alone; rather, he was inspired by the grace of God to know the truth. The question that Jesus asked 2,000 years ago is one He continues to ask his disciples today: Who do you say that I am? How we make our choices determines the answer to this question. Do we make
choliques as Jesus did? He asked his Father only one question—“What is your will?” Or, do we make choices in accord with our will? Are you living a life that is fully engaged?

If everything is looking blurry in your life right now, maybe you need to simply look to Christ’s example and change the way you are making your decisions.

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