September 1, 2019: Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I was a kid, Labor Day weekend was about two things: the last weekend of freedom from school and the Jerry Lewis Telethon. The Jerry Lewis Telethon was a must-see event that much of the country watched. It was not necessarily that everyone watched every moment of it, but people generally knew what was happening. Some of the best moments during the show was when they showed the update on the tote board as donations poured in. And each year there was that striving to see the total best moments of the year before, which included some amazing guests. Of course, one of the most memorable moments was when Dean Martin made an appearance in 1976. Martin and Lewis had not been on stage together since 1956. I looked online and discovered that the 1976 telethon was the most watched telethon ever. And, of course, each show finished with Jerry singing “You’ll never walk alone”—usually in a very hoarse and raspy voice since he had been up for over 24 hours.

Over the years we have sort of lost these moments of community connection for our country. When the Jerry Lewis Telethon started, you could watch it on three channels. Today we have hundreds of channels to watch, but if we are honest, we have to admit that there is very little of real worth to watch on television. With that said, it has become increasingly difficult to have that must-watch moment that calls everyone to the TV. But, as Catholics, we are truly blessed because each week we do have one of those must-watch moments—it is called the Mass.

Each week we are invited by God to come together as a community united by the Holy Spirit, to both celebrate and experience the salvation Christ has won for us. The whole purpose of the Mass is that—through that experience—we become united with each other through our unity in Christ. As Christians, as we seek to find Christ in our lives, we should be drawn to the story of the travelers to Emmaus. Two disciples are walking along the road in despair, and they feel lost for they believe they have lost Christ. And in the moment of their deepest grief they are joined by a stranger. This stranger breaks open the Word of God for them, and in the breaking of the bread, they discover who He truly is—the One they have been seeking. The story of Emmaus is the story of Christian life as it is lived out daily. But it is also the story of the celebration of the Mass. Think about this story: two are gathered in the name of Christ, and as He promised, He is in their midst. The Word of God is then proclaimed and explained in order to help us break open God’s saving work in our own lives. Then, through this experience they are led into the celebration of a meal where bread is offered, blessed, broken and given—and Christ is recognized. The journey to Emmaus is the story of how we celebrate the Eucharist.

Hence, if we think about what we do in the Mass, it easily corresponds to how we are called to live in Christ. As we wake up in the morning, we are called to recognize the presence of God in our lives and to reflect on the meaning of a Christ-like day. This is what we do in the Introductory Rites as we begin with song, reflecting on the meaning of our celebration. We are then able to recognize God’s presence through the Sign of the Cross and the apostolic greeting “The Lord be with you.” Then, we are called to reflect on those times when we might have failed to live as God has called us to, and to seek his mercy and grace in order to live differently both now and in the future. That is what we do when we pray the Penitential Rite and the Kyrie. Our reflection on God’s mercy leads us to praise of God, and to prayer, as we sing the Gloria and pray the Collect (Opening Prayer). As we pray in the morning, it opens us to listen more attentively to God speaking to us in his many and varied ways during our day. Similarly, the Introductory Rites prepare us to listen attentively to the proclamation of God’s word during the Liturgy of the Word. As the Liturgy of the Word prepares us, in part, to celebrate and experience the salvation offered to us through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, so do our daily prayers and listening for God’s word prepare us to experience his salvation as a reality in our daily lives. When we understand that our lives are about living out the salvation Christ has won for us, then the four actions of Christ in the Liturgy of the Eucharist—to take, bless or give thanks, break and share—become the basis for how we are called to act toward others. Like Christ, we take the gifts the Father has given us and return a prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude to God. This recognition, that all we have comes from the Lord, should fill us with a desire to break open our lives and give
of ourselves as gift to others, just as Christ does for us in the Eucharist. In that way we become the presence of Christ in the lives of others; we become what we have received—the body of Christ.

The Mass, then, is not simply something we do on Sunday; it is the very model for living out our lives in Christ. It forms us through Word and sacrament, and transforms us through the grace we receive. This celebration gives us the strength to both live out and become what we receive, and therefore, becomes the central reality of our lives as disciples of Christ being sent out to love and serve the world. The Mass leads us on the adventure that is Emmaus, that of discovering Christ in our lives, and through that experience, of discovering ourselves. The Mass is not simply something we do; it should become who we are in Christ—his very presence in the world.

The Mass truly reminds us that we will never walk alone, for in the Mass we become more deeply united to Christ and to each other.

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