March 1, 2020: First Sunday in Lent

When I was about twelve years old, my friends and I went into the woods down the street from my home. There was a river that ran through it, and down river there was an easy way to cross over. But we, of course, chose the more difficult way. There was a point in the river where you could jump from rock to rock and eventually get across. That was where we decided was the best place to cross the river. When it was my turn to make the trek and I was about half-way across, I jumped onto a rock and my feet slipped. As I fell, my glasses came flying off my head and into the river. I never saw them again.

The worst part was that I had just gotten those glasses that day because I broke my last pair. The last thing I wanted to do was go home and tell my parents what happened, but I knew it was necessary: my parents would figure out pretty quickly that something was wrong when they did not see the new glasses. We continued playing for a while in the woods and then I decided to go home and face the music. When I got home and told my parents what happened, they were not at all happy. But they also were not angry with me because they understood it was an accident. However, they made it clear that there was going to be a consequence for what happened. They were planning on buying me a new bike for my birthday, but they could not afford both the bike and another pair of glasses. They decided that the glasses were more important. I’m not sure I agreed with them at the time.

This was an important life lesson for me. The choices we make can have ramifications we cannot always anticipate. The choice was simple: what is the best way to cross the river, or what is the most fun way to cross. We had done it numerous times, and so I thought nothing about doing it again. And yet that choice would prevent me from getting something I truly wanted.

In our lives, we obviously face decisions and choices that can have many different consequences. We cannot always predict where each decision will lead us, nor can we always foresee the final results of our choices. Many times we fall into Monday morning quarterbacking: after the fact, we realize that our assessment of the situation was flawed and that a better way would have been to make a completely different decision. But, of course, we generally cannot undo the consequences of our decisions.

However, there is a way to ensure that the choices we make will bring about the consequences that are best for us. And that way is to follow the direction of Christ. Jesus’ entire life was based on understanding God’s plan for Him as Messiah. And He sought to understand God’s will through his faith and through the scriptures. But, most importantly, it was about deciding how He was called each day to live out the Father’s plan for his life.

He used prayer as a way to discern God’s will for Him. Jesus often took time to go off by himself in order to communicate with the Father. He particularly did this when it came time to make the biggest and most important decisions of his life. And, we are called to do the same. The reason many of our decisions go haywire or in directions that are painfully destructive is because we are making them without discerning God’s will.

One of my favorite lines from the psalms is, “Be still and know that I am God.” If we want to be able to hear the Lord, then we need to create space for God to speak to our hearts. If we want to be able to learn to hear God’s voice in our lives, then it is necessary to quiet down our own voice. We too often simply talk over the Lord. We must realize that many times God speaks to us as He spoke to Elijah on the top of the mountain. God did not speak through the loud events, but rather, in the small still whisper. We must remember that Abraham simply walked with the Lord when he had his conversations with God. In many of the stories that we read in the scriptures, it simply comes down to the lesson of Martha and Mary. Martha simply continued what she was doing when Jesus came in, while Mary actively stopped what she was doing, sat, and listened to the Lord. She chose to be attentive to the Lord in order to understand what He wanted, what He needed. We must make the words of Samuel truly our own, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Prayer is not simply saying a few words, and then finishing up and moving on. Prayer is a conversation we have with God that is intended to help us grow in our relationship with Him. And the purpose of the conversation is both to learn about God and oneself. Again, God has a plan for you and wants to share that plan with you. He also knows the best way for you to live out that plan in your life. The only way we can come to know and understand God’s plan for us is to allow Him to show it to us. We need to allow God to chart our path, rather than ourselves.
May we use this Lent to grow not simply in prayer, but rather, in true dialogue with the Lord. May we use this Lent to come to discern God’s plan for us. May we use this Lent to make our lives conform to the life 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