April 19, 2020: Second Sunday of Easter

There were two incidents when I was in the Holy Land that truly fascinated me. One occurred the day we were in the Judean Wilderness, heading to the spot where we would celebrate Mass. Obviously, in that moment, I was dressed in my clerics, and two people stopped me and Fr. David to ask if we were Catholic priests. We, of course, said, “yes.” They were so excited to see us! They were Catholics from South Carolina who had gone on pilgrimage with a Protestant group. They made it clear that the experience was not quite what they had been hoping for. Their group looked at things a little differently than we would as Catholics, and they had not been able to go to Mass during their trip.

The second incident occurred at the Dead Sea. I was waiting in the parking lot for members of our group to come, from changing after floating in the water. I was directing them to our tour bus and, while I was standing there, a gentleman came up to me and asked if I was a Catholic priest. I again said, “yes.” He then asked if he could take a selfie with me. I have to admit that I was a little taken aback by the request, but I agreed. He said I was the first priest he had seen there. (I didn’t understand that because I saw lots of priests all over the place.) It was clearly important to him to be seen with a priest.

I have to admit that both of these encounters got me thinking. The thirst that the first two people had for connecting with the Church in their journey through the Holy Land was a little heartbreaking. It was clear that they felt something was truly missing during their time there. Obviously, I am not a celebrity and so the idea of a perfect stranger wanting a picture with me was somewhat foreign. And yet, it was clear that it was not so much about me, but rather, what I represent. He wanted to make some connection to the Church as he traveled throughout the Holy Land.

As we each make our journey through life it is easy to take things for granted. It is much like what we are going through during this difficult time: because of something so small, because of something we cannot see, because of something beyond our control. And, because it is something that can affect us in catastrophic ways, we have not been able to gather as a community, as a family of faith. And it is in that moment of loss that we can most powerfully recognize our need. In our time of social isolation, we have come to recognize that what we always thought would be there, suddenly is not. It did not matter when we came to church because we could come whenever we wanted. And, then suddenly, we could not! We are learning a lesson. Too often we look to what we have and see all that is wrong with it. We long for times long ago that were different, or better. We consider what we have and find fault with how others are handling their responsibilities, and we think about how we could do so much better. We create our own barriers and those barriers can bring about a sense of isolation in our lives. We begin to cut ourselves off because we are waiting for perfection—as we see perfection. And then we lose the connection that we so desperately need.

We truly need each other. The Church is not about the buildings, but rather, it is about what the buildings allow us to do. It is a place of gathering. It is a place of bonding. It is a place of encounter and experience. It is a place where we can come to understand our place in the world. The Church is about what we seek to make of ourselves. Or, to put it in a better way, what Christ is trying to make of us.

It is so easy to lose the connection that helps us get our bearings. It is so easy to allow the barriers to become our truth. It is so easy to see only faults and brokenness, until the time comes when it is no longer there as we truly need it to be.

We can look at our present situation only in the negative, or we can see it truly as an opportunity. It is an opportunity to recognize the great gift we are to each other. It is an opportunity to recognize how Christ is using each and every one of us in another’s life. It is an opportunity to move beyond how we think things should be, to work together to build what it is that Christ wants.

We will never be the ‘perfect community’. We will never be a people without faults and brokenness. But what we can be is a place that welcomes each other with our faults and in our brokenness. We can be that place where people encounter Christ—He who invites all to his table, not because they are perfect, but because they need his strength and healing.

Let us take this opportunity to become a community that is truly united, as we recognize what was truly missing in our lives!
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

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