May 3, 2020: Fourth Sunday of Easter

I have written in the past about my Aunt Ahboo (my Dad’s aunt). My Aunt had some interesting quirks, one of which had to do with keeping her house warm. She never put air conditioning in her home because she simply was always cold, and she was like this her whole life. In the middle of the summer it could be 80 degrees out and she would have the heat on full blast. My Aunt had a cat called Mittens, one of the friendliest cats you could ever meet, but Mittens’ one problem was that she weighed about 25 lbs. (We only discovered later why the cat weighed so much. Ahboo fed Mittens three full cans of food each day and also gave her condensed milk. When my father’s sister Gael took Mittens after Ahboo could no longer care for her, she put the cat on a diet.) I remember visiting Aunt Ahboo one time when I was about ten years old and probably weighed all of 50 pounds. It was a very warm July day and, as usual, the heat was on in the house. As soon as I sat down, Mittens jumped onto my lap, curled up, and fell asleep. Shortly after the cat fell asleep, I did too because of how warm the house was. Probably about twenty minutes later, I woke up because my legs were hurting from the weight of the cat; they had fallen asleep and had started to feel like pins and needles were sticking into me. I promptly got the cat off me, slowly got up, and started walking around until feeling came back into my legs. I certainly was not expecting that to happen.

In our faith life we can so easily fall asleep. All we have to do is think about the story of the Agony of the Garden, when Jesus asked his disciples to simply stay awake for one hour with Him. Jesus needed the support of those around Him as He struggled with what God was asking of Him. He simply needed to know that they were joining Him in prayer. And yet they could not even stay awake for one hour. Now, of course, there are those who will come up with an excuse for their behavior. It had been a long day and they had eaten the feast of Passover, and those things would make anyone tired. It is always easy to find excuses for why we can fall asleep on God.

We can come up with lots of issues or responsibilities that get in the way of prayer or thinking about God. God will understand how busy I am in my life. God will understand that I need to have other priorities right now. God will understand that there is only so much time in the day, and well, at the end of the day, I am spent, tired, and simply cannot fit prayer in. Prayer is nice and can be helpful but is not really essential for living out my life.

We can raise lots of concerns for why we need to follow the way of the world rather than Christ. The teachings of the Church and the scriptures are out of date. We need to recognize that times change and so we need to modernize for the message of Christ and the Church to be relevant. The Church really has to be able to adjust to a new way of thinking and looking at things. The Church needs to be more welcoming, supportive, and open to how people see themselves now. It cannot be so rigid in holding on to the past.

The reality is that the teachings of the Church, whether they concern the necessity of prayer, or what we hold as the deposit of faith, or our moral groundings, all arise from one place—Christ! Christ is the truth, the way, and the life. The truth that Christ proclaimed was not about a set of rules in and of themselves. Christ proclaimed that there is one truth, one reality—and that is Christ himself. To live life in a balanced way is only possible through our relationship with Christ. Embracing truth is not about what makes me happy or fulfilled. Embracing truth is about embracing Christ. And Christ challenges us to wake up from our slumber. Christ challenges us to move away from what we think is right. Christ challenges us to move away from how we think the world should be. Christ challenges us to move away from self-centeredness. Truth is not subjective to a time, place, or person. Truth is objective and unchanging.

It is a difficult lesson for human beings to really grasp. We all have the tendency of wanting to bend the truth in accord with our perceived needs and desires. We want the world to work according to what we believe will bring us the most satisfaction; what could possibly be wrong with that? We think we know what will bring us the greatest sense of contentment, but God alone is the one who actually knows how we can accomplish this. Therefore, to both understand and achieve our purpose in life, we need to wake up and discover the meaning for which God has created us.
God’s way is not the easy or simple way. Christ described it as a narrow and rocky road while the way of damnation is smooth and wide. Following Christ comes with a cost and the cost is the cross. And the cross teaches us that the way of Christ is the way of humility, obedience, self-offering, laying down one’s life, sacrifice, and unconditional love. It is the way of faith, trust, hope. It is the way that says ‘not my will but yours’. It is the way that our ‘yes’ leads to the death of the cross but also to the victory of the resurrection.

May we use this time to wake up and recognize the one who is calling us to come and follow Him. May we stop finding excuses for why our way is the best way, but rather, simply hear Christ asking us to come and pray with Him. And may we simply say, “Here I am Lord. I come to do your will.”

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