May 17, 2020: Sixth Sunday of Easter

The other day as I was praying in the rectory chapel, Harry, my cat, was laying on me. He was very content and was purring away as I was doing his favorite things—petting him and scratching him under his chin. He remained on me for about twenty minutes since he was getting the attention he desired. Then, inexplicably, Harry jumped off my lap, walked over to another chair, jumped up and laid down there. He was still purring when he left me, and so I could not really figure out why he decided to move.

That whole incident got me thinking that this is often how we end up treating God. He is paying attention to us and giving us what we want, but somehow it’s not enough. We kind of walk away from Him. And we have lots of examples of this in the Bible.

It starts with Adam and Eve. They literally have everything they need. They lack for nothing. And yet that was not enough for them. Instead they decide that they need the one thing God told them they could not have. In fact, God was very clear about what they wanted—that it would actually harm them—but they go for it anyway. And their decision will reverberate throughout the centuries.

We see it in the story of Exodus. The people complain about the cruel slavery they have endured in Egypt and so God sends Moses to free them. He does some extraordinary things to make it clear to them that He will force the issue with Pharaoh. The ten plagues of Egypt! God then helps them escape Pharaoh’s grasp by parting the Red Sea and destroying Pharaoh’s army. Then the people find reason to complain about the food and so God provides them with manna from heaven, but that is not enough. He provides them with meat and that is not enough. He provides them with water and that is not enough. Even when they are safe and free but Moses stays on the mountain a little too long for them, they reject God and worship idols made of gold. And the gold they used essentially came from the God they were rejecting.

King David is another example. He was taken from being a shepherd and given the kingdom. God rejected King Saul in favor of David. David had everything he could possibly want and yet that was not enough for him. He saw the beauty of Bathsheba, and his heart lusted for her and so he took her. When he found out she was pregnant with his child, he tried to trick her husband into having relations with her, but it did not work and he had him killed. Even though he truly had it all, David wanted something more.

It is so easy not to see all that we truly have. We get so used to what we have that we take it for granted and only recognize what is “missing.” And then we focus on what is “missing” and decide that what we have is simply not enough. It’s like when we buy the newest gadget. We can get obsessed with all the accessories we can add to it, to make it better. The gadget itself is no longer good enough. Moreover, we can start to see the “needed” accessories as almost more important. They tell us what we don’t have, and that what we do have is less than it should be. Our gadget is no longer good enough.

Now, that can happen in our relationship with God as well. The reality is—if we are honest with ourselves—that no matter how much God gives us we can find fault with it. Life, really, is about finding joy in what we have, which reminds me of the lyrics in a song Sheryl Crow sang a few years ago: “It’s not about getting what you want; it’s about wanting what you got.” The reality is that we can so easily lose sight of what is right before us because it becomes too familiar. It becomes the norm and benchmark for what should be. Rather than recognizing the gifts we have, we see them as what we deserve, and therefore do not count them as blessings. We can only focus on what should be ours and is not.

When we look to Christ, we see someone who lived with an eye of gratitude for all He was given. Rather than seeing things as his by right, He recognized each gift He received from the Father as a blessing. Each person who came into his life was a gift. Each day was a blessing and therefore an opportunity to praise God. Each material possession was an opportunity to give thanks. Each way that He was called to be an instrument of God’s mercy in the world was a moment to allow God to be seen.

We need to see life through the eyes of Christ. Rather than focusing on what is not, we need to focus on what God is doing in our lives, each and every moment. All we have that is truly good must be recognized as a gift from our loving God. And if we can stay in the moment and see what God is doing for us—with, through, and in us—it can change our
expectations. It will no longer be about what is missing. It will no longer be about what we could have. It will no longer be about what could make this moment better.

Instead, it will be about finding joy in the moment. It will be about finding the wonder in all that God has given to us. It will be about learning to be truly content not because of what we have, but rather, because of who gave it to us. It is simply about finding joy in knowing that our God is with us, as seen through his gracious gifts.

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