June 14, 2020: Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ

Each morning when I pray, I pray not only the readings of the day but also the Mass prayer texts for the day. When I was praying this past Monday morning, I was really struck by the Collect for the Mass. It goes:

O God, from whom all good things come,
grant that we, who call on you in our need,
may at your prompting discern what is right,
and by your guidance do it.

This particular text stuck with me throughout the day. Each time I was praying or thinking about what to write for my column, this text kept popping into my mind. It became quite evident to me that God wanted me to write about it. As I continued praying over the words and seeing what it engendered within me, so many different thoughts came to mind.

One of the regular conversations I have had with people during my years as a priest has dealt with those times in their lives when they felt overwhelmed. And these feelings can show themselves in many different ways. But the general sense is that people get so focused on the issues confronting them that they cannot find a solution for how to move forward. They have the perception that they are trapped and there is no way out. And, in that situation, they can become lost and confused. The reality of their lives can cause them to become depressed, angry, hurt, and disconnected from life and the people around them. At times, my response to people caught in such a cycle is the story of Saint Peter, when he was called by Jesus to get out of the boat and walk on water to Him. Peter does just that, but then he loses his focus on Jesus and instead starts to focus on the storm and waves. As it dawns on him that he is walking on water, he begins to drown. But the moment he begins to drown he calls out to Jesus, who lifts him back up and returns him to the boat. Like Peter, the only way we can handle an overwhelming situation—when we recognize we are walking on water—is to shift our focus from the issue-at-hand to Jesus.

Over my time in the Collaborative, I must admit that there have been times when I struggled to determine the right way forward. And, quite frankly, I thought the issue I faced at the moment was simply like that of many people: I was being called, like Peter, to walk on water but at the same time to keep my focus on Jesus. Whenever I have felt overwhelmed and frustrated, it was simply because I had lost my focus on Christ. So... I am called to hear what this prayer is saying to me—to call on Him in my need and seek to understand how He is prompting me to act.

One of the most difficult parts of being a pastor in a collaborative is that every choice I must make affects the life of two very different communities. It is much more complicated than running a single parish. Each choice is evaluated by people through very different lenses and the concerns I hear from people are the same from both communities. I am called to try to anticipate a lot of different concerns, questions, and problems that may arise from any decision, and it is not always a simple solution that will resolve an issue. Every situation that arises seems to create a new level of complexity that will lead to some other concerns not originally thought about. The real problem is that with every new circumstance that arises, I must seek to find as balanced an approach as possible that serves both communities.

This has been particularly true during the time of the pandemic. We are all in a very different and unexpected place. It has created stress and anxiety in all of us in various forms. And as we open up the Church once more to public worship services, we get a whole new level of issues that need to be understood and balanced out. However, we must also face the reality that the situation we are in is fluid, and the decisions we are making now are not permanent, as the guidelines we are given are changing almost daily based on new information.

Talk about walking on water! And yet, it is all good. Honestly, the support that the community has given is truly amazing. People have shown tremendous patience and understanding as we are navigating very different circumstances. And yet the most important part of all of this is really, again, found in the above Collect. It is simply recognizing that God is here with us in our need. And God is showing us the way to go. God’s promptings can be discerned if we are open to recognizing His actions in our lives. He will both show us the way to go and give us the grace to follow His guidance. It is not always easy to do, but in our most difficult moments it is essential that we keep our focus on Jesus.
God is with us. God is here in our need. God is both listening and guiding us. The only question we need to ask is, are we paying attention to His promptings?

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