



Homily for 9/20/2020

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time A

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Nobody likes a flat tire. It is inconvenient at the least, dangerous in the extreme. It never happens at an opportune time and can really ruin your day. I had a flat tire last week. It felt like no good deed goes unpunished. As a priest I travel a lot to minister to people. I had gone to visit a family to bless their house the day before. At some point in that trip back home I picked up an industrial staple with nail-like tips that pierced right into my tire. I didn't realize it and had no clue it had gotten stuck into the tire. Luckily, it didn't make much of a leak, so I made it home without even the tire pressure warning light coming on. But it was a leak, nonetheless. It slowly deflated the tire throughout the night so that the next morning, Sunday morning, someone came by the sacristy while I was getting ready for mass and said, "Father, you've got a flat tire!". Well, darn. If I'm honest, I probably thought something else in my mind. What an inconvenient thing to have to deal with on a Sunday morning! I'm already running around with a couple of Masses, confessions, people wanting to talk to me and decisions needing to be made, and now I have this to deal with! On top of that, I had been planning to go out of town for my day off to get some quiet time, and now that seemed to be slipping away because I would be dealing with this crazy tire all afternoon. Why, Lord? Why would you do this to me? And why would you choose right now when things are craziest? Now this seems sort of trivial, and it is. But it begs the question that many ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is so good, why does He let evil seemingly triumph?"

I hear a lot of this sort of thing as a priest, and the problems are usually way worse than a flat tire. People are looking for answers to the problem of evil in their life, and they come to the ministers of the Church seeking wisdom. I remember one of those instances just a few years ago. A man had been fired from his job. It had been a huge step in his career to get that job. It was the advancement he had been waiting for. It meant a jump in pay and opportunity to really shine as a leader. Of course, it came with its downsides too. There was a lot more responsibility attached to it. It was a high-pressure job that never stopped. He spent a lot more time at work and much less time at home with his wife and kids. Then that day came. A phone call and that was it. He was on the roll of the unemployed. Back at square one. He fell into a little bit of a depression and was wondering, "Why, Lord". Why would you do this to me? Why would you cut me down in my prime? And so, he came to me seeking wisdom. I did what I had been taught. I directed him to the cross of Jesus Christ. I said, "I don't know why God would allow this in your life. But I do know one thing: God the Father allowed something even worse and more tragic than that to happen when He allowed humanity to crucify His Divine Son. His Son also willingly embraced that same cross. He taught us that life is full of crosses. He taught us that God is love. He taught us that no greater love exists than to lay down your life for your loved one. He taught us that the cross is only a step towards something greater when He revealed the resurrection. He promised that those who believe in Him and eat His crucified and risen flesh and drink from the chalice of suffering from which He drinks will have life forever. He taught us that God's ways are not like man's and that His way is as far from man's ways as the heavens are from the earth.

I told that man to take up this cross; to see in it an opportunity to have faith in the God who loves us and to trust that this is not the end. This is the greatest wisdom: With God all things are possible, and God's Grace is sufficient. God can write straight with crooked lines. He only allows evil so that good may come of it. In the will of our Loving God, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Perhaps he is getting you lined up for a kingdom far greater than the one you had imagined for yourself. Keep your eyes open to see the good that God has in store for you.

I recently caught up with that man and we discussed where he is, now some years later. I asked him how he was doing. Even though he had had further setbacks after that event, today he is so much better off. For starters, he said, he has a much more enjoyable job. Even though the one he had been let go from was more prestigious and lucrative, he had not been happy with it, and the pressure of it had caused him way more stress than he needed. Now he was happy and fulfilled in his present situation. And the greatest gift that came out of losing that job was the gift of time. The previous job had been all-consuming, and to do it, he had had to neglect his family. Now he



has lots of quality time to spend with his family and his young children who are in the prime of their childhood – a childhood he would have missed, had he stayed in the previous job. He told me life isn't perfect, but he has been able to see the hand of a Good God in what seemed like an event that promised to ruin his life. He told me that he likened it to the story he had heard of a professional photographer on the sidelines of a football game. A certain play caused a player to crash into him, smashing his expensive camera, and sending him falling to the ground. He sustained a bad concussion, and so they rushed him to the hospital. When they did a scan of his brain, they discovered a major tumor – unrelated to the concussion – which, had it been left alone, would have killed him. Thanks to the accident, the tumor was caught and removed, and he lived. A broken camera was a small price to pay for that!

Our faith teaches us to trust in Divine Providence. God is a Good and Generous God whose mercy overflows. It doesn't always look like it from our perspective. But our perspective is flawed and incomplete. With faith we turn to the God Good who reveals His love for us in the person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son who lays down His life on the cross for us. These days we have need of a lot of faith like that. Coronavirus is one of those things that challenges our faith. It has disrupted everything. But the person of faith, believing in a Good God, turns to the Omniscient and All Powerful One and faithfully repeats in the darkness, "Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you." "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him." This disease has made us appreciate the fragility of life, but more importantly, it has made us realize that we can't take our faith and the saving sacraments of our Catholic faith for granted. Does God cause natural disasters or evil in men's hearts? No. But He who is Almighty and All-knowing allows them, that a greater good may come from it. We haven't yet begun to scrape the surface of what the Good God has in store for us who trust in Him. I was reminded of that last Sunday afternoon.

As soon as they took the flat tire off, the light of faith dawned on me. It startled me how good my God is to me. He really did will my good, even if I had just grumbled to him about how inconvenient this cross was. You see, as the tire came off, it became apparent that there was a major flaw in it. On the inside edge, where no one could see, the rubber had worn away along a substantial portion – so much so, that the steel belts that held it together were exposed. This tire had become dangerous to drive on. I had been about to drive a long distance on it, and it could have caused a catastrophic accident. Thank God for a flat tire! Thank God, indeed! In that instance I knew that my God loved me. It was one more instant in a long string of instances that can only be seen with the eyes of faith. But when we see it, we must acknowledge it.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call him while he is near.
Let the scoundrel forsake his way,
and the wicked his thoughts;
let him turn to the LORD for mercy;
to our God, who is generous in forgiving.

May Jesus Christ be Praised!