

Fr Ryan Homily 10/4/20

Read: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:12-20, Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

In order for high school students to get into a college that they applied to most of the time they have to take a SAT exam. SAT means statistical aptitude test and it's made of these 3 different sections: mathematics, reading, and writing and each of those 3 areas is worth 800 points to the student so if you do the math the best score you get on a SAT is 2400 points. And so intense is our desire to do well on the SAT's that it can become the sole focus of a person's education. Where the goal is to score really high on the SAT's not necessarily to excel in terms of cognitive education or a more problem-solving liberal arts education the goal is to do well taking that test. Everything they do, everything they learn, everything that they are formed in is orientated towards doing well on that exam. And so intense can the competition be in getting those high scores that there are families that will actually hire imposters to go in place of the students and take the exam in their place. That happens, that's true. There was a story from a while back where there were 7 high school students who were arrested on Long Island because they hired these kind of wiz kids. And you would hire this person, get them a fake id, and give them something like \$2500 and he would go in and take the exam in the name of the student. More recently, you may have heard of these Hollywood parents who paid off universities to allow their kids to get entrance in, the kids didn't even know. And when you hear stories like that, because of course they get caught and then they're going to jail, but when you hear stories like that it may lead you to wonder how did we get here? Where doing that kind of stuff is okay, how did we get to this place and not just those examples but in general you look at a lot of different areas where people lie and they cheat to get ahead. And when they get caught there's a scandal and people are outraged but it keeps happening. So, we can ask how did we get here? And I think I know at least part of what the answer is; we got here because we love success. I mean we love success. That god of success is a god that we pay homage to on a regular basis. In fact, I've heard of priests and ministers and others in the church that have this very attitude and communicate in these terms of numbers and success and speak of the god of success but superimpose him onto our God to try to communicate to us that they are one and the same. And I get it. Wanting to evaluate how we're doing whether it be personally, whether it be as a church, it's very tempting to make a

judgement using that god of success, the bottom line. You know if there's a silver lining to all of this coronavirus business, which I'm tired of and as I'm sure everybody is, if there's a silver lining it seems to have cut the legs out from under this god of success that we want to run our lives by. It's kinda scary when you look at the budget. It's kinda scary when you look at what mass attendance has become or whatever else it might be. All these ways that before you could look at and tell ourselves that we were doing a good job. we can track the data of how we are succeeding. We can't do that anymore, at least not right now. But maybe that isn't such a bad thing. You know, Christians are never supposed to evaluate themselves on the terms of the god of success but how human it is to do it. You know, 2020 is kind of like cold water in your face. It's not all bad, there is some good that can come from it. But because we love evaluating ourselves by the god of success it can be very comforting when things are well and there's a surplus. But it's a false comfort because it has absolutely nothing to do with Jesus Christ. Hence the parable is today's Gospel. Jesus tells a story about a vineyard owner who builds a vineyard, and he leases it out to tenants, and then he goes on a journey. Eventually, he gives instructions for his servants to collect the produce from the tenants. Only they don't want to give the produce. So, they end up destroying the servants. So, the vineyard owner says well I'll send my son, they'll respect my son. And when they see the son coming, they say well this is the heir to the vineyard, let's destroy him so that we can acquire his inheritance. See, in the time of Jesus there was a custom through which if a landowner would disappear and was presumed dead, the first person to make a claim on that property would be awarded it. So, in this scenario that Jesus creates the tenants they see the heir coming and if they can destroy him, they think they can acquire all the property. So, Jesus tells the story, which in essence is a foreshadowing of his own story, and He says to the chief priests and the elders, what will that vineyard owner do to the tenants? And they say well he will take those wretched men and put them to a wretched death because that's what powerful and successful people do. Vengeance. Retribution. But Jesus says no no no, you don't understand. He says the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. But He, Jesus, is the son in the story. He's the stone that's been rejected by the builders. Jesus Christ is abandoned, He's crucified, He's annihilated, wiped out, taken off of the board. By the standards of success, in any human formulation of that word, Jesus is a resounding, crashing failure. He is the

stone that's been rejected by the builders. But that failure on the part of Christ, His crushing utter defeat, that stone, that person, that failure has become the cornerstone on top of which the Catholic Church was built and stands and flourishes. Are you catching my drift in what I'm trying to say in this whole thing? The very person that failed, in every worldly meaning of that word, has become the cornerstone on which the church has existed and grown and expanded for over 2,000 years. Why? Because God was doing something else with Jesus the entire time. Jesus never set out to find worldly success; that was never His mission. His mission was to win souls back to His Heavenly Father precisely by subverting worldly standards of success. He came and He taught us a different way to live not according to the ways of the world and then He died a shameful death in our place. And when all hope was lost, God raised Him from the dead. God did something new. He is the one who truly comes out on top because He doesn't play by the world's standards of success. And if we are going to be His followers, we have to do likewise. But we struggle to see the world and this life the way that Jesus did. Don't we. Because we love and sometimes worship success. We teach it to our children. How important success is, to reach for their dreams and let no obstacle prevent them from getting what they want. And yet there are very valuable lessons that we can learn through failure. We can learn valuable lessons when losing things that we hold dear. In fact, the most profound of those lessons is the acquisition of humility. It is very difficult to acquire humility when all a person does is go from success to success to success. And yet humility is the very thing a person needs to understand how the complete failure of Jesus was the best thing to ever happen to this world. So, I guess the question you and I need to ask ourselves today is do you worship the god of success or the God of Jesus Christ. And you must choose. It's not possible to worship both at the same time.

Amen