

020710 5th Sunday in OT On Humility

I have a story to share with you. This story is shared with the same intensity and directness that you heard in the second reading. That's when Paul wrote to the Corinthians and he said words such as, "I handed something to you... you can take this to the bank because it is completely true. This is what you need to consider AND ACT ON for your salvation."

My wife and I lived for two years in Ocala, Florida -- we started going to a church called Queen of Peace. The parish started really small -- and I'll come back to that in a minute. By the time we started going to Queen of Peace -- there were some 4,500 or more families -- with a significant number of vibrant ministries. The ministries were all run by the laity -- with only steering and direction given by the pastor. It was a marvelous parish to belong to if you wanted to become a real Catholic -- a faithful, active, practicing and believing Catholic.

Long before we joined, when the parish was getting its start -- they didn't even have a building. I think they had about 250 families at that time -- mostly retirees who came down from the north. They met in an all purpose hall in an assembly building in a retirement-oriented, large-scale housing development. If you happen to know the area -- that Florida development is called On Top of the World.

The pastor's name was and is Patrick J. O'Doherty.... I talked with him a couple days ago. In fact I did a recorded interview with him for a program we are doing on the internet on the subject of TRUTH. Fr. Pat is fiercely truthful -- especially on matters of pro-life... marriage and the truth of God found in Holy Scripture. One of the early gifts to the new church was a large reproduction of a scene from today's Gospel. It was a picture of Simon and his co-workers pulling up empty nets. They had been fishing -- fishing long hours and not catching any fish.

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Does that not sound like the words of Peter from tonight's Gospel? Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing. That's the image on the large wall hanging that Fr. O'Doherty inherited when he took over this fledgling, startup church. And meeting in a hall -- it must not have seemed much of a church to the retired people coming to fulfill their weekly obligation for Mass.

Father O'Doherty used to come ahead of the time for Confessions and Masses... he would sit before that picture and he said he used to pray about his little church in Ocala: Lord -- I'm fishing and my nets are coming up empty... there isn't much life here.. no one is joining this church... I'm like Peter who catches nothing... absolutely nothing. Imagine how that feels to a priest who is in love with Jesus and in love with the Church.

Now fade from this image of a pastor praying before the picture in the assembly hall church. This will seem like a change of subject -- but it isn't. Fr. O'Doherty gets notified by the bishop's office that he has to attend a mandatory retreat for the priests of the diocese. Father didn't want to go because he wanted to be working on his new church. And in a way, to make matters worse, the retreat leader was going to be a nun. Her name was Sister Briege McKenna.... who as it turns out is a world-traveled speaker and has a great devotion to the Eucharist and to priests. Fr. O'Doherty later told us he wanted nothing to do with leaving his new parish -- and he certainly didn't want to go to a retreat led by a nun.

But in obedience -- he goes to the retreat -- he listens to a couple talks with Sister Briege McKenna. Father O'Doherty had never met the nun before, but he decides he wants to talk to her. So he arranges for a meeting with Sr. Briege... and when they get together... Sr. Briege told Father she wanted to pray over him. She lays hands on him and she sat in silence -- one hand on his head.... one on his shoulder.

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And then Sister McKenna said to him.... I see a picture of you sitting and praying before a picture of Peter and his companions and their nets are empty. They aren't catching any fish... I see that you are worried about your own fishing and that you aren't catching any fish in your nets.' I'm here to tell you to keep doing the will of God... Keep preaching Truth and proclaiming Jesus Christ... and your nets will be overflowing.'

This story happened to the priest who prayed before the picture -- telling God that he needed help... that he was a sinner and a weak or poor shepherd... and as I've already told you -- this Queen of Peace parish that started with something like 250 families is now 4,500 families with one of the most beautiful and traditional Catholic Churches you'll ever see in America. It's this parish, there are so many ministries and services that it is amazing to see it all working. They record all of Fr. O'Doherty's homilies and they make them available as CD's or audio tapes... they have a group that assembles St. Therese of Lisieux Sacrifice Beads and they've sent out over 75,000 of them throughout the United States and to many foreign countries. They have a gorgeous adoration chapel that's open and with people present before the Blessed Sacrament 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Fr. O'Doherty is the first visitor from Queen of Peace to visit those in hospitals & nursing homes. I've gone with him on prison visits... He still goes and blesses the homes of newcomers.

So what is the point of this story? Well - someone might take offense and suggest it's a knock-down of our parish here? Not so. This parish also does good things here. Some might want to compare Fr. O'Doherty to the priest we have here or the ones that have gone before the pastor. My answer? Not so -- we've had a pastor here who died several times from liver failure and he's now faithfully saying Masses seven days a week.... he's anointing the sick... and repairing damages of time and inattention to this parish complex.

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So what is the point? There are several. One point is that there are priests who believe they are doing God a favor by being priests and saying Masses. There are laity.. people who work around the Church who believe they are going God a favor by some ministry or other. Inside, they may think to themselves, 'this couldn't run without me.'

And then we have shepherds like St. Peter... or like Fr. O'Doherty who fall on their knees and say, ""Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Humility is the difference in real leadership. In my own preaching, I've told of going to Queen of Peace church and hearing Fr. O'Doherty saying 'My name is Fr. Patrick J. O'Doherty, and I'm a recovering sinner.' And he meant it. I've not heard hardly any priest or the laity share with me how much their sin weighs on them. I've had plenty who suggest in one way or another how large and in charge they are.

On a related point, the readings today deal with three saints. They are the prophet, St. Isaiah, then Paul in the second reading – St. Paul, and then St. Peter in the gospel. There are things they hold in common. And the same things that held them in common are the same things that should hold us in common with them. Each one of them had a humungous sense of their own unworthiness – they knew that apart from God, they were nothing. We hear in the first reading Isaiah cry out "woe to me – woe to me for I am a man of unclean lips – I live amongst a people with unclean lips... That means I am a sinner. In this day and age, I wonder how many people come to Church feeling they are sinners? Not so many would be my guess. These days, people prefer to go to Joel Osteen type churches where they tell you everything is okay -- and God wants you to be happy and He wants to make you wealthy. This is one of the travesties of the broken family of Christianity. It's people who want a sort of deodorized Christianity.

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Some of you know that I am also a fan of Fr. Larry Richards from back in Erie, PA. I use his CD's and videos -- and I borrow from his thoughts... About this topic area and about humility, Fr. Larry says, "You will never be a great saint, unless you know that you are a great sinner. Let me say that again – You will never be a great saint, unless you know that you are a great sinner. A sinner has that form of subtle pride... the kind that gets in there and robs us of salvation... because it's the pride that said I want to do things my way... I'm darned good." I have seen it in priests. I've seen it in parish staffs and volunteers. Sadly, I've seen it and gone to confession about it in my own life.

Fr. Larry spoke about this when he said, "Let me give you a hint – God doesn't need you and He doesn't need me! Sometimes we think He does! God doesn't need you or me – BUT He has called us. And when you and I come before Him and acknowledge who I am without Him – then He can do great things for me and with me. And one of the ways that we can do this – basically – every day – throughout the day – is learn the Jesus prayer. I don't know if you know the Jesus prayer – it is ancient and it's been taught almost from the beginning of Christianity. The early mystics taught and said the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ" – "Son of the Living God" – "have mercy on me" "a sinner." "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner " In Florida, Fr. O'Doherty's version was simpler: "Jesus, I love you. Possess me." He said it hundreds and hundreds of times a day. It's hard to be proud and arrogant when you sincerely pray for Jesus to take possession of you... So If, like me - you struggle with puffery or arrogance, remember these prayers -- or the Litany of Humility. It's on the internet. If you can't find it, ask me or email me and I'll get you a copy. Blessings.

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Reading I

[Is 6:1-2a, 3-8](#)

In the year King Uzziah died,
I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne,
with the train of his garment filling the temple.
Seraphim were stationed above.
They cried one to the other,
“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!
All the earth is filled with his glory!”
At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook
and the house was filled with smoke.
Then I said, “Woe is me, I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips,
living among a people of unclean lips;
yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
Then one of the seraphim flew to me,
holding an ember that he had taken with tongs from the altar.
He touched my mouth with it, and said,
“See, now that this has touched your lips,
your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.”
Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”
“Here I am,” I said; “send me!”

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8](#)

(1c) In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,

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for you have heard the words of my mouth;

in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;

I will worship at your holy temple

and give thanks to your name.

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Because of your kindness and your truth;

for you have made great above all things

your name and your promise.

When I called, you answered me;

you built up strength within me.

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

All the kings of the earth shall give thanks to you, O LORD,

when they hear the words of your mouth;

and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD:

“Great is the glory of the LORD.”

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Your right hand saves me.

The LORD will complete what he has done for me;

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your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;

forsake not the work of your hands.

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Reading II

[1 Cor 15:1-11](#) or [15:3-8, 11](#)

I am reminding you, brothers and sisters,
of the gospel I preached to you,
which you indeed received and in which you also stand.

Through it you are also being saved,
if you hold fast to the word I preached to you,
unless you believed in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received:

that Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
that he was buried;
that he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

After that, Christ appeared to more
than five hundred brothers at once,
most of whom are still living,
though some have fallen asleep.

After that he appeared to James,
then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one born abnormally,
he appeared to me.

For I am the least of the apostles,

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not fit to be called an apostle,
because I persecuted the church of God.
But by the grace of God I am what I am,
and his grace to me has not been ineffective.
Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them;
not I, however, but the grace of God that is with me.
Therefore, whether it be I or they,
so we preach and so you believed.

or

Brothers and sisters,

I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received:

that Christ died for our sins

in accordance with the Scriptures;

that he was buried;

that he was raised on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures;

that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

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though some have fallen asleep.

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Last of all, as to one abnormally born,

he appeared to me.

Therefore, whether it be I or they,

so we preach and so you believed.

Gospel

[Lk 5:1-11](#)

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God,

he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.

He saw two boats there alongside the lake;

the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon,

he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore.

Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,

“Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

Simon said in reply,

“Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.”

When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.

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They signaled to their partners in the other boat
to come to help them.

They came and filled both boats
so that the boats were in danger of sinking.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said,
“Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him
and all those with him,
and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee,
who were partners of Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid;
from now on you will be catching men.”

When they brought their boats to the shore,
they left everything and followed him.