

071110 15th Sunday in OT Love the Lord With All

Dear members of our parish community.... dear visitors.... the majority of my life.... the majority of my years I have spent testing the Lord... sometimes testing Him outright... sometimes more subtly. Testing the Lord just like the scholar in today's Gospel... not that I'm a scholar -- but I have had a history of testing the Lord. This reminds me of a related story....

Did you hear about the fellow hiking along the Rim -- not too far from here. As he stops to take a break and drink from his water jug, he's looking over the beauty of God's creation spread out below him... And he steps a little closer and some rocks give way and the man slips until he falls off the outcropping... As he's slipping, he grabs a large root coming out from the side of the wall. In an instant, that root is the only thing keeping him from falling 1,000 ft and more to a certain death.

So what does he do? HELP.... HELP... is there out there? Nothing. HELP.... HELP.... Can somebody out there help me.... No sound... The man knows this is a critical situation and he decides to cry out to God.... GOD... IF YOU'RE THERE LET ME KNOW. A loud voice says, "YES.... I'M HERE. WHAT DO YOU WANT?" "LORD SAVE ME... TELL ME WHAT TO DO.... The voice of God answers: "My Son... I love you. If you love me completely... I want you to let go of what you're holding on to. Have trust in me."

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The man thinks for a second -- and then he makes up his mind:
"HELP.... IS THERE ANYONE ELSE OUT THERE?"

That fellow holding onto the root describes most all of us. We act like we don't need much of anything in our lives... until there's a need in our lives. I mean... it was me that got myself into a career in computers; it was me who got a job working at the Pentagon for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was me who picked out my wife... I earned a pretty good living while I moved our young family around the country... Yes -- I'd say I am pretty much a self made man...

But why is it that I had this emptiness inside of me? Why was it that I bought into the lifestyle of those earlier years -- padding expense accounts, breaking promises and doing things I wasn't proud of? Why was it that I became tender when I saw conversion stories or sweet young families going to Church? Why was it that I felt deeply called to change my life when a Jewish friend of mine risked everything when he went to his large employer and confessed he had been stealing from them? Why is it that even when I made the decision to come to Church back then, it felt only somewhat of a help? I can tell you folks now who are hearing this homily that the reason for all of my struggles and failings was because I hadn't surrendered and let go and let God!

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The testimony that I share with you today is that I came to the understanding that no matter how scary things are... no matter how messed up I have been -- God is waiting for my call... my plea. My surrender.

I have another story to share with you. It really touched my heart and I hope it will move yours. To start with -- there is a Franciscan priest -- his name is Fr. Dave Pivonka. Many times, he's been at the powerful priest, deacon and seminarian conference I've attended at Franciscan University. His work is mostly with young people -- teens, twenty-somethings. He's now in charge of Washington, D. C. area seminarians.

Fr. Dave has written several books. One that I recommend to you is called "Hiking the Camino; 500 Miles with Jesus." It's his experience as he walked the 500 mile pilgrimage in Spain, ending at the burial place of St. James. But Fr. Pivonka has written a more recent book called Spiritual Freedom; God's Life Changing Gift. I interviewed Fr. Dave and here is a story he shared with me from his book on Spiritual Freedom.

Fr. Dave sees a lot of young people -- counseling, guidance, vocations... one of the people he was seeing was a young college student named Jennifer. Jennifer had lost her mother to cancer while Jennifer was in high school.

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There was a lot of pain... outrage with a God who would take away a mother that Jennifer loved... She started making some bad choices... having improper relationships, using drugs and other bad behavior. In her pain, she came to see Fr. Dave... in tears, she told him her story. Father said that through all of this, God loved her and was waiting for her return. "Father - you just don't know the things I've done." "No I don't -- God does and he has always loved you.

In this one counseling session, Jennifer didn't seem like she was buying into what Fr. Pivonka was saying... All the time, she was nervously playing with... flipping a penny she had found on the floor of Father Dave's office... A few days later, Fr. Dave received this letter:

"I was thinking about the penny I was playing with the whole time we were talking. Pennies go through a lot of 'stuff' too. They get passed from person to person and dropped in the mud and stepped on. But no matter how dirty and beaten up they get, their worth stays the same. Some pennies have an easy life and they are all shiny. But then, you get the black ones and you know they've been through a lot. It's just like people... some of us are shiny and new and some of us are dirty and beat up, but we are all equal worth and we are all loved.

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Jennifer continued: "I feel like I'm one of those dirty pennies in the gutter you picked up, you brushed me off and showed me I have worth. You told me a lot about God-- a God who loves me and doesn't want me to hurt or hate or be angry. And for the first time, I'm starting to think that maybe that could be true."

Are you like Jennifer.... hurt and angry and upset with people or institutions? Perhaps not so shiny from the things that have happened in your journey? Are you like the hiker on the top of the Rim? Fully in charge of your life -- even in charge of how you are going to practice your Catholic faith -- no matter what the Church says? Are you hanging on and fearful of letting go and letting God?

Fr. Pivonka wrote that Jennifer said it better than any theologian or scholar can say it... Christ doesn't make a decision to love. Christ simply loves. He doesn't love in degrees... His nature is complete love. Today... wherever you are in our faith journey -- you can have confidence in the words of the Responsorial that we just did: **Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.** And then, once we've surrendered to this - we begin the joyous journey to living out the oldest guidance and call in Jewish and Christian history... *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*"

Reading 1

Dt 30:10-14

Moses said to the people:

"If only you would heed the voice of the LORD, your God,
and keep his commandments and statutes
that are written in this book of the law,
when you return to the LORD, your God,
with all your heart and all your soul.

"For this command that I enjoin on you today
is not too mysterious and remote for you.
It is not up in the sky, that you should say,
'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us
and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?'
Nor is it across the sea, that you should say,
'Who will cross the sea to get it for us
and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?'
No, it is something very near to you,
already in your mouths and in your hearts;
you have only to carry it out."

Ps 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

Responsorial Psalm

R. (cf. 33) Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.

I pray to you, O LORD,
for the time of your favor, O God!
In your great kindness answer me
with your constant help.

Answer me, O LORD, for bounteous is your kindness:
in your great mercy turn toward me.

R. Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.

I am afflicted and in pain;
let your saving help, O God, protect me.
I will praise the name of God in song,
and I will glorify him with thanksgiving.

R. Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.

"See, you lowly ones, and be glad;
you who seek God, may your hearts revive!
For the LORD hears the poor,

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and his own who are in bonds he spurns not."

R. Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.

For God will save Zion

and rebuild the cities of Judah.

The descendants of his servants shall inherit it,

and those who love his name shall inhabit it.

R. Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.

or

[Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11](#)

R. (9a) Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The law of the LORD is perfect,

refreshing the soul;

the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,

giving wisdom to the simple.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The precepts of the LORD are right,

rejoicing the heart;

the command of the LORD is clear,

enlightening the eye.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The fear of the LORD is pure,

enduring forever;

the ordinances of the LORD are true,

all of them just.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

They are more precious than gold,

than a heap of purest gold;

sweeter also than syrup

or honey from the comb.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

[Col1:15-20](#)

Reading 2

Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God,

the firstborn of all creation.

For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,

the visible and the invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;

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all things were created through him and for him.
He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile all things for him,
making peace by the blood of his cross
through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

[Lk 10:25-37](#)

Gospel

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said,
"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law?

How do you read it?"

He said in reply,

You shall love the Lord, your God,

with all your heart,

with all your being,

with all your strength,

and with all your mind,

and your neighbor as yourself."

He replied to him, "You have answered correctly;
do this and you will live."

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus,

"And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied,

"A man fell victim to robbers

as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead.

A priest happened to be going down that road,

but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

Likewise a Levite came to the place,

and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him

was moved with compassion at the sight.

He approached the victim,

poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them.

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Then he lifted him up on his own animal,
took him to an inn, and cared for him.
The next day he took out two silver coins
and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction,
'Take care of him.
If you spend more than what I have given you,
I shall repay you on my way back.'
Which of these three, in your opinion,
was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"
He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."
Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."