

26th SUNDAY IN O. T. 100106

Hello! Blessings! For our visitors who may not have heard -- over there in the Celebrant's chair is Father G., our pastor. And my name is Deacon Tom... and by a plan that we have worked on for awhile -- our intent for the month of October is that we will have some special homilies -- teaching homilies to help us in our faith journey... hopefully, to help us prize and celebrate our faith more and more.

Next -- some of our parishioners know that I have a sort of a medical condition. About a year ago, a doctor operated on one of my vocal chords -- and removed a portion of it. I still struggle with speaking a little. And because I still have some problems, what they want to do next is they want to extract some fat from my stomach. They want to inject it into my impaired vocal chord.

So far -- the people of this parish, they are so good to me -- I've had 33 parishioner offers to donate fat... You visitors just don't know what a caring parish we have. I'm thinking we may just start a new faith tradition -- a Tithing of the Fat! So today, if my voice sounds a little different or breaks somewhat -- you'll know what's going on.

Well, let me start with a story. There was a nice young lady attending Sunday Masses here. She was a Baptist -- married to a Catholic. And she did what several mixed-faith couples do -- in tolerance and in truth, they supported each other in the practice of their different faith journeys. . I'll come back to that...

This woman was from ‘down yonder.’ With a wink, she called herself a ‘Southern Fried Baptist!’ One day I had the opportunity to talk personally with her. I asked her what she thought of this parish – and about our worship. With a big smile – she said she loved it – it was almost exactly the same as they had in her church back home. I’m sure my jaw dropped, and I asked her, “What do you mean?”

She proceeded to tell me that on Sundays, they have a starting hymn... They have an opening prayer... and then a reading or readings from Scripture... then some inspiring or challenging preaching... more singing...” So to her – this worship we did here was just like what she was used to...

Unfortunately –she and I ran short of time and that’s about the end of that particular story. But it made me think -- I’ll bet there are a lot of Protestant brothers and sisters... and sad-to-say – probably some Catholics who believe that WHAT WE HAVE is ‘just like WHAT THEY HAVE.’ Well – let me start with a message of truth – that notion that this is all the same is wrong. Out and out wrong! And to many of those folks who hear preaching or teaching messages that espouse the correctness and the holiness and the Truth and Traditions of the Catholic Faith – to them – it sounds divisive... it sounds intolerant. Let’s look at today’s readings and see if we can help apply Scripture to the topics of truth and tolerance.

At first glance it would seem that the first reading –about Eldad and Medad prophesying without having consulted Moses... and today's Gospel passage about someone driving out demons without consulting with Jesus or his apostles – it would seem that the readings in both cases speak to us about tolerance for people of other journeys... In other words, be tolerant and get along.

Moses didn't say the two men were wrong. In fact – Moses said – would that the Lord gives his Spirit to all believers. And Jesus didn't say the man driving out demons was wrong – but Jesus didn't endorse him either. This then is tolerance – how much heavenly wisdom we need to know when to be tolerant. And how much more wisdom and grace we need to know when to stand up for truth.

In recent years, the subjects of truth and tolerance have been misunderstood. Many mistakenly affirm that there are a multiplicity of truths that can even contradict each other. Relativism is the root of this erroneous notion that asserts that what is true for me, may not necessarily be true for you. Each individual is the measure of what is true and there are no objective standards. Applied to religion, relativism states that all roads lead to the same God, and all religions are the same. Applied to morality, the determination of what is a moral or an immoral act is left to the subjective decision of the individual. Thus, in the case of abortion, pre-marital sex, or contraception, the individual determines the morality or immorality of the act, not the objective law of God.

And now, we have some 28,000 differing Christian faiths... a new tower of Babel has been built with people setting themselves on high – independent of any normative understanding of God's plan.

The Second Vatican Council has shed much light on the subject of tolerance. The Council teaches that the fullness of truth subsists in the Catholic Church. Protestant denominations are understood as our separated brothers and sisters who possess some of the truth, but not the fullness of the truth. Non-Christian religions are understood as having elements and even seeds of the truth.

Not all religions are the same, and each of us has the obligation to pursue the fullness of the truth. This is a statement of our faith. You and I should feel comfortable and we should not squirm if we say that the fullness of God's Truth for salvation is found in the Catholic Faith.

Yet – we need to be prayerful and loving and tolerant of our separated brothers and sisters... Tolerance does not mean a disguised superiority – but a comfort in knowing that if they had the same journey, the same formation and guidance and understanding that we have experienced, then in all likelihood – these men and women would be here worshiping with us today. Tolerance also shows us how to respect those who do not come to accept the truth. Tolerance means that we are to be open to all, and accept people as they are, not as we want them to be.

Once we accept people for who they are and truly understand their needs, we can work to gently lead them to the truth of Jesus Christ. For this reason, the gospel says: *"Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward"*

But, tolerance does not mean that everything is permissible. Let me share a story that I have struggled with in my own family – but I'll bet it's one that many of you have faced. Say that you have a daughter who is living with someone she isn't married to. The daughter and her friend come home to visit for Christmas. What to do about the sleeping arrangements? What to say? We make up rationalizations such as: "Well – they're going to do it anyway... Or – we'd rather they stay with us than feel like they aren't welcome."

Christ didn't condone unmarried sex... and the Church teaches similarly. Faithful Christian parents know that pre-marital sex is wrong. If we allow a daughter or a son to share a bed with a friend in our home– this is an erroneous tolerance that only causes scandal. *"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea"* (Mark 9: 42). There are many times when charity simply demands intolerance. We cannot participate in the sin of another person. This is the struggle of parents: we love the sinner, but never condone the sin. As someone wisely said, how has it come to be that we are so polarized in our thinking?

We have become so self-righteous that in the name of tolerance, we permit anything and condemn nothing. And in this vein -- today is Respect Life Sunday. We know that Christ told us to welcome the little children. And the Church teaches the value of human life. We can't -- we absolutely must not allow ourselves to believe that any fabrication of the word CHOICE gives us the authority to deny life to a child in the womb. We know this can be difficult in this world of corrupted values -- but Jesus commissions all of us to proclaim truth.

Therefore -- I ask and pray that you will always support life. That you will stand for life. That the truth of the words that we say in our Creed: "... The Lord and giver of life..." -- that these words will challenge us to see that we are partners with God in life -- we are not the authors. Please join us for the Life Chain silent protest. We meet at 2:15pm at the library parking lot. We will be joined by many of our separated brothers and sisters. This is one of the ways we can show our unity to the truth of God's plan for life... Come and stand or sit and just pray for one hour that there will be peace in the womb... and that peace in the womb will lead to peace in our world. Now next week, God willing -- we will talk about the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Marriage. In so doing, we will espouse another truth of our faith: no other Christian ceremony of worship is anything like the Mass. Jesus himself participates in, and gives himself to us in the Mass... and he joins with the couple in marriage... And marriage is a sacrament that is once and forever. Thank you. And blessings. [Special thanks to Fr. James Farfaglia for allowing me to use some of his homiletic work]