

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Good morning and please be seated.

In the Epistle, Paul says to us, “Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food.”

I have a friend, Jim, who was given a shotgun as a teen. Pretty ordinary gift in my rural hometown. He said he shot it once and felt so bad because he killed a rabbit. After that, he hid it in his closet! As Jim grew older, many years older, he realized that he had anger issues. The rest of us saw it all along, but suddenly Jim realized it too. He was so angry about a neighbor that he was beside himself. Suddenly, he called a friend who happened to be a police officer and a collector of guns and asked if he wanted his shotgun. Jim knew that there were times he lost sight of the person next door and just got caught up in his anger. Jim realized his anger might get out of control; self-awareness. How often do we take the time to look into our heart to discover who we really are, what are our true intentions and motivations? How do we face the struggles in our life?

My favorite cartoon is Calvin and Hobbes. Fr. Aelred, prior of St. Gregory’s Abbey, calls this comic strip, the best theology of the 20th century. One of my favorite offerings is this: Hobbes, 5yr. old Calvin’s stuffed Tiger who only comes alive in Calvin’s presence, is pushing Calvin down the hill in his red wagon. Calvin says, “It’s true, Hobbes, ignorance is bliss. Once you know things, you start seeing problems everywhere...and once you see problems, you feel like you ought to try and fix them and fixing problems always seems to require personal change...and change means doing things that aren’t fun! I say phooey to that! But if you’re willfully stupid, you don’t know any better, so you can keep doing whatever you like.” Calvin continues, “The secret to happiness is short-term, stupid self-interest.” By this time, Hobbes is in the wagon with Calvin and they are going faster and faster. Hobbes screams, “We’re heading for the cliff!” Calvin replies, “I don’t want to know anything about it.” They crash! Hobbes says, “I’m not sure I can stand so much bliss.” And Calvin responds, “Careful! We don’t want to learn anything from this!”

At a very low point in my life, I was talking with my friend, Fr. William. He pointed out that life seemed to be a series of lessons that we can learn from and grow. I remember telling him, like Calvin, I’d rather be willfully stupid for the rest of my life, than learn anymore. Sometimes the “lessons” ahead of us are very painful and I know I struggle to get through.

Isaiah tells us “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” declares the Lord.. Learning to respond with faith is the challenge for me. A wise friend said once that we all face troubles in our lives, it is how we learn to respond to these troubles that is important. Do we have the fist to heaven cursing God or do we trust that God always has our back no matter what?

I was married the summer before my senior year of college. After Bill and I graduated we moved to the Chicago area where his family lived. Bill began to have some medical issues, went to the doctor and was hospitalized. After many tests, he was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia and given five years to live. When Bill went into remission, he asked me for a divorce. He wanted me to go back to Iowa so that I could be with my family. I resisted, he insisted. Five years later, my sister is diagnosed with cancer and given 6 months to live. My sister was in New Jersey when she died. Not until after her funeral did I hear from Bill’s mother that Bill had died in Chicago 15 days after my sister died in New Jersey. Who could have predicted that? Only God. Did Bill divorce me because he didn’t love me anymore? His parents told me about a safe deposit box Bill had. The only thing in it was a picture of me.

Jesus asks us to look into our hearts. What is our intention or motive when we are angry or compete with other people? Jesus is not asking us to feel the burden of more guilt, he’s asking, he’s imploring us to keep our eyes on people instead of fear or greed or self-will. Paul calls us infants in Christ. I have been that person with the fist to heaven. I have been that person who drinks too much to dull the pain. I have been that person who was too afraid to look at the truth. None of us have the answers, but together we can grow in our faith and face each lesson of life in the trust that we are profoundly loved. We are profoundly loved. We may not understand why something has happened, but in time we will, with God’s help.

Our collect for today sums this up: “O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you; Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed.” I continue to grow into the person God calls me to be. That growing will never end in this life. It is hard, but we do not face the struggle alone. Turn to God first, listen with the ear of your heart and remember we are all brothers and sisters in God through Christ.

Amen

The Rev. Ann Gaston