

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 8.19.18

Proverbs 9:1-6/Ephesians 5:15-20

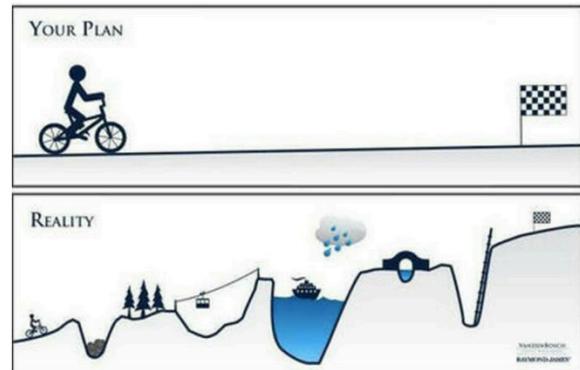
John 6:51-58

LOOKING FOR LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

On Friday morning I celebrated Mass at our Cathedral of Christ the Light for the annual gathering of all Catholic elementary school teachers and staffs of the Diocese of Oakland to inaugurate the new academic year. There were over a thousand people in attendance – a few more than our little summer “Mass-on-the-Grass.” I was so honored to be asked to preside and preach, but also a little anxious, especially when the music began and I saw row after row of worshippers as we processed down the long aisle of the cathedral. The scriptures were very upbeat and encouraging: St. Paul emphatically telling the community of Philippi- “*Rejoice, I say it again. Rejoice!*” and the words of Jesus from Matthew’s gospel – “*Don’t worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.*” In three days time these teachers would be in their classrooms surrounded by children and youth... and parents in carpool lines, so I thought they might need some “reality therapy.”

I took my cue from the Bay area author and teacher, David Richo and his book entitled: *The Five Things We Cannot Change and the Happiness We Find by Embracing Them*. The first thing is **Everything Changes and Ends**. Think how difficult that must be for the people who lost their homes in the Sonoma fires and those who are suffering from the fires in Redding. They’ve had to face the fact that nothing in life is permanent – not a job, not our youth, not a home, not our very lives. The second thing we cannot change is that **Things Do Not Always Go according**

to Plan. For teachers that’s a hard one because they’re all about lesson plans. They work late and on weekends planning and preparing their classes, always trying to stay two steps ahead of their students. When something interferes with our plans, we get bent out of shape, short with people and irritable.



The third thing we cannot change is the fact that **Life is not Always Fair**. You win some and you lose some. How is it that we live here in northern California in the lap of luxury with the backdrop of Mount Diablo and all the beauty that surrounds us, while millions of people throughout the world live with a backdrop of bombed out buildings or boarded up and broken-down houses. Life isn’t fair. As adults we understand that. For children, whether eight or eighteen, it’s one of the most important, but most difficult lessons they need to learn.

The fourth reality is that **Pain is Part of Life**. Every Catholic Church has a prominent image of Christ on the Cross; that’s the inevitable path to Christ’s resurrection and glory. The first of Buddhism’s four pillars or “noble truths” is that life is suffering. It’s present to us every day. The pain may be inflicted on us by someone else, or it may be random and accidental, like a fall, or it may be the result of our own foolishness or lack of care. Nonetheless, through it we learn

patient endurance and the ability to extend compassion to others who suffer.



The final thing we cannot change is the fact that **People are not Loyal and Loving all the Time.** The truth is - some people come through for us and others betray us. Some care tenderly about our feelings and others trample them underfoot. When that happens it's natural to want to retaliate. Our faith offers us a different way. In his Letter to the Romans St. Paul challenges us: *Repay no one evil for evil, but live peaceably with all. Never avenge yourselves, but leave that to the Lord. To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; your generosity will surprise him with goodness." Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.* I was hoping that they could take some helpful insights for the coming school year.

Then I knew I had to address those teachers who daily pour their lives out for children, as I knew I would have to address you today, about the resurgence of the issue of child abuse within the church. It's a painful topic and one we dread, but the news this week has raised it again and demands a response. This week, we as Catholics have felt a deep sense of betrayal from people – religious leaders –who were not loyal and loving. It has pierced us like a stab in the heart. With the publication of the extensive Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Tuesday, detailing over seven

decades of clergy abuse in that state alone, more spotlight has been shed on a dark chapter of our Church's history. As egregious as the actual abuse was, the cover-up by bishops who, trying to preserve the reputation of the church, exposed God's little ones to life-long damage from abusers who were transferred from one parish or institution to another – that sin is equally to be condemned.

The cases in this report cover a long period of time, seventy years. Many of the guilty are dead, as are many bishops who turned a blind eye, worried too much about the Church's reputation, or failed to understand pedophilia as a disease that cannot be cured. I hope you're aware that, since the American Bishops' Charter in 2002, there is a zero-tolerance policy in place today.

CHARTER FOR THE PROTECTION OF
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



15TH ANNIVERSARY
2002 - 2017

**THE CHARTER FOR THE PROTECTION
OF YOUTH AND YOUNG PEOPLE
REQUIRES EACH DIOCESE...**



to have an Office
of Child & Youth
Protection



to have an
independent child
abuse review board



to undergo regular
external auditing of
its compliance with
the Charter

Dioceses have mandatory preventative programs for those who interact with children, and any priest or church employee who even has the hint of an accusation leveled against him or her is immediately suspended from duty, and the civil authorities are called upon to investigate. Unfortunately, this has not repaired the devastating breach of trust caused by

years of obstruction, denial and negligence on the part of leaders of the institutional church, especially bishops and superiors of religious communities, who returned abusers to ministry repeatedly, while doing little or nothing to care for their victims or protect those who were vulnerable.

Along with the lives of so many who were permanently scarred by the abuse, there is other devastation that is still taking place. For some people animosity and hatred for the Church and all that it represents has blinded them to any good coming out of the church and religion. Some people will never be able to get past that and see the Church as a means of hope and salvation. They'll never be able to hear Jesus' words of love, forgiveness and compassion because those who were and are supposed to represent Him and speak for Him and live like Him have failed in their eyes. It will take a long time for trust to be restored. For some, that will never happen.

Friday night the shame and anger I felt over all this made me restless. It was difficult getting to sleep. I had a vivid and disturbing dream. I don't often remember my dreams, but I woke up with enough awareness to recall the images. And they were dark. I was standing near a church building that was destroyed.



It was leveled and there was debris and rubble inside – everything was murky. It was like a combination of things destroyed this church – charred remains like the fires we've experienced in California. But it also looked like pictures I had seen of the interior of the Coventry Cathedral in England immediately after it was bombed on November 14, 1940 by Hitler's Luftwaffe. And there was water and mud, like some of the aftermath of devastating floods that we've seen in the past few years.

It was Holy Saturday night. The Easter Vigil, the holiest night of the church year, was supposed to begin but I couldn't go inside. Some people were telling me that we had to celebrate the Easter Vigil anyway – in spite of the condition of the building. I couldn't imagine how we could in a church so destroyed and I resisted them. Then I remember that a car pulled up and two adults dropped off a young girl. She was carrying a case with an electric piano to set up and play the music for the Easter Vigil. With that the dream ended. I'm still trying to decipher what it meant, but I'm hoping that the presence of the little girl and her music is a sign that somehow we can still celebrate in the Church and find the light in the midst of darkness -- beautiful music amid the sounds of anger and rage.



As I told those thousand Catholic teachers and staffs on Friday, with the grace of God and the courage that comes from the Holy Spirit, we will all have to wrestle with this reality and do whatever we can, as parishioners and clergy, as members of our Catholic community, to show to one another and to the world a different face of the Church – the face that guards and protects, loves and inspires the children and youth under our care. St. Paul's words to us today offer a timely admonition: *Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.*

John Kasper, OSFS