

Homily February 4, 2018

There was a retired gentleman who lived next-door to my parents. He seemed to have nothing to do. He had no yard and apparently no hobbies. He spent endless hours standing on his porch smoking his pipe or walking his dog. I contrasted him with my Dad who never had enough time to do all the things he felt ought to be done. He was always working on several different projects, some of which never were completed. It didn't seem to bother him, it was the work, the effort the forward movement that was most important. The two represent two basic kinds of people: those who stand on the sidelines, and can't seem to recognize any responsibility or zeal to get things done, and those whose vision and sense of responsibility stretches even beyond their abilities, and yet they courageously dig in.

The Gospel presents Jesus as one of the latter. From a human perspective, at any rate, Jesus would appear to be engaged in an unattainable task - so many to heal and more importantly so many to preach to. He had finished preaching in the synagogue, where he had cast out a demon. He healed Peter's mother-in-law. After the evening meal, more people were brought to Him. The next day, after going off to pray for a while, he was sought out and told that the people of the town were looking for Him and what He could do for them. But it was time to move on and preach in another town.

The divine person, Jesus Christ accomplished what He had come to accomplish, salvation for all through His death and resurrection. And He established the Church to take up the seemingly unattainable task of preaching the truth and offering His healing touch to each person, throughout the world and throughout all time.

In our second reading St. Paul exemplified one within that Church who has accepted the call to do His part in giving himself to the seemingly unattainable task of preaching to everyone. He spoke of an obligation that had been imposed, but one he has accepted willingly. His self-sacrificing approach to preaching exemplifies the sense of urgency and value to simply doing the work as much and as effectively as possible.

Job reflects this same spirit in our first reading. He is the classic example of one who has suffered and yet remained faithful to God. He simply marched through his sufferings, even without the support of friends, never getting the answer to the why of his suffering. Nevertheless he was confident that he had his relationship with God, it would endure beyond all suffering and that is what really mattered.

Job points us in the direction of what gives us hope as we do our part to take up the seemingly endless task of the Church. It is about the consolation we can find in our encounters with Christ along the way of our effort. The central mission of Jesus Christ was to restore all of humanity to a right relationship with God. That is what He made possible through His death and resurrection. In God's plan each person must freely accept that restored relationship with God through personal faith in Jesus and His Gospel. And the work of giving each person that opportunity is what Jesus has entrusted to the Church. That is the task that can seem so unattainable when we think of the broad expanse of history, the past, the unlimited future and the far reaches of our world. Even the challenge of helping the people closest to us may heighten the sense that we are engaged in an endless task. The consolation comes, however, when we realize and discover over and over again, the means, the activity of the Church's great work, the task itself is an experience of the goal. Every effort we make to help bring others to know Christ becomes an occasion of our own deeper encounter with Christ.

If we want to help others come to faith in Jesus Christ, and fidelity to His word, we will first be driven to self-improvement. We will find ourselves engaged in the activities that deepen our own encounter with Christ: our daily prayer, the Mass and sacraments, greater efforts to learn, and know and understand. Once again I want to put a plug in for a Lenten effort to learn more about the Mass from the Christmas gift book, as well as to reflect on our experience of the Mass using the pamphlet on Getting More Out of the Mass. With enriched personal prayer we will be moved to pray for those whom we encounter in our daily work. While working that others may encounter Christ, we encounter Him all the more. And each time we reach out in service of word or deed to another, we can experience an interior satisfaction and peace that comes from knowing we truly can reflect Christ. He truly is with us. And when our effort to care for and love others are acknowledged and returned, we experience Christ and His Holy Spirit at work among us.

There is always more we could do to foster our own spiritual growth. There is always more we could do to nurture and guide those around us, especially our children, and to seek to encourage them all through their lives. The opportunities to transform the world and all its inhabitants so that it is more like the kingdom of God are endless. We can never do everything that we might see ought to be done. But what matters is that with faith we

dig in, knowing that the goal of eternal union with Christ will begin immediately.