

LIVING LIFE AS IT COMES TO US

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People often ask questions about things that happen in life. “Why are there tornadoes?” “Why does God allow that to happen?” “What was he thinking yesterday?” The litany could fill these pages but you understand and have heard plenty yourselves. I’m sure you’ve asked your share of questions too. We all do and will continue to stand back and wonder at the marvels and tragedies that are presented to us as we continue our journey to the heart of God.

Recently I presided at my first Covid wedding. Given all the restrictions of public gatherings during the plague, it was still one of the most heart-warming and uplifting celebrations I’d been part of in ages. The music, the people all well-spaced and masked (even the bride and groom wore masks that matched her dress and his tux) – everything fell into place and every person was lifted up with joy! We live-streamed the celebration to 60 of their relatives in Ireland and reveled in the miracle of love that God had poured into the couple’s hearts. They had postponed the wedding once but decided to accept the Covid parameters and celebrate what God had given them.

He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice decision but of God. This is a marvelous passage from the prologue of John’s Gospel [John 1:10-13]. Whether we are cradle Catholics or people who have recently professed faith in our tradition, we have all accepted Christ by virtue of Baptism and ongoing participation in the life of the Church. There are many ways we can renew our commitment to the Lord’s challenge to live the Gospel. The Eucharist is the perfect way in which we are reconciled with

God and others; we offer ourselves with the presider and community to the Source of all Life, accepting the Paschal Mystery as the pattern of our existence. Admittedly though, we sometimes come to the Lord’s Table occupied with thoughts and concerns that compete with that notion of acceptance. Ask anyone who’s lost her or his job recently and all they can do is beg God for protection, guidance and help. That’s called being human and distractions should not be considered sinful. Even when we preside at Mass there are times when people in church can distract us during the most sacred moments. It happens. And that’s why I encourage people to look at their commitment to Christ at various times during the day and during the week. We accept the Paschal Mystery and live it all the time, not just 60 minutes on the weekend.



How do we make it through moments when life presents us with challenges that are, at first appearance, impossible to survive? Well, if you’ve experienced the destructive forces of nature like fire, floods or tornadoes you know the enormous amount of energy and determination it takes to recover. How many interviews during or right after a disaster do we see in which victims will say: “We lost everything, but at least we have each other.” That kind of statement may (to someone outside the damaged area) sound like a cliché but there’s truth therein. The

‘each other’ is an acceptance of loss that was beyond one’s control and yet a confirmation that this pain has been accepted and we are willing to deal with it and even be grateful to be alive with family and friends.

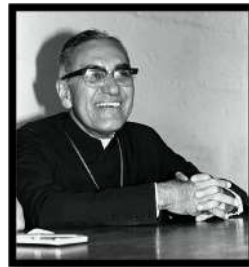
The Lord himself taught the world how to accept what life presented him. How many stories in the Gospels are about the opposition he faced almost constantly from religious leaders, lawyers and Romans? How many times did people clamor after Jesus for hope and took him for granted? How many people were touched by his miracles and preaching yet never did respond with gratitude? The ultimate act of acceptance in the life of Jesus was the fact that *he took the form of a slave... humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.* [Phil. 2:7-8]. The humility of God in the person of Jesus Christ was the powerful magnet that drew Francis of Assisi further into the Mystery of God. It was not his knowledge of God but his pure love for God that enabled Francis to accept so much in his life. Let’s learn from him because humility is the very heartbeat of our Franciscan pattern of life, a pattern rooted in Jesus.

St. Bonaventure wrote *The Evening Sermon on St. Francis* given in Paris on Oct. 4, 1255. He spoke eloquently about the virtue of humility in the lives of Christ and Francis. Perfect humility is “the greatest virtue and only the humble revere God, for the rest of people seek to glorify themselves, not God.” Then Bonaventure outlines four pathways to humility. 1) Meditate on God. 2) Remember Christ’s humility, especially in his Passion and Death. 3) Assess oneself by remembering where you came from and where you are going in life now. 4) Respect your neighbors because you will be thinking more about others than yourself. Great life lessons in those pathways for anyone professing to live by the Gospel. Bonaventure ends his massive sermon with acclamations about how Francis so emulated the humility of God in Christ and was therefore, lifted “to the heights of glory. May the only begotten Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of St. Francis lead us to those same heights.”

Francis contended with many physical maladies during his twenty years of religious life.

He also suffered emotionally too, which I believe can be an even heavier burden. When the fraternity he founded was more and more institutionalized by the Church he relinquished leadership a few years before his death. He was pained by the infighting of the friars about money and large, permanent dwellings some had already built for communities. He did learn how to accept whatever life placed at his feet with a certain amount of equanimity and joy because Francis was rooted in the humility of Jesus as the guiding virtue of his own life.

When any disciple of Christ is faithful to the Gospel, she or he is guaranteed to face many difficulties and challenges. If you’ve been following the Sunday selections from Matthew the past few months you know what Jesus faced from those who did not believe in him or his mission. Jesus makes it very clear that anyone and everyone who follows in his footsteps will encounter people who do not accept the message of God’s Kingdom and preaching its love, truth and goodness. I can testify to that just by the rare letter we get in response to some of these Legion articles; people can be judgmental and even mean in expressing opinions. But such is life when we live and preach the Gospel truth, not what people think is their truth.



Oscar Romero is an example of a person who bravely lived, preached and died with the Gospel as his life. He daily faced opposition because of his words and support for the poor of El Salvador. March 24, 1980 he was gunned down at the altar while celebrating the Eucharist. This man remains an exemplar of accepting all that comes in life while remaining faithful to the ways of Christ. During the process of his canonization doubts were presented as to whether he was truly a martyr for our faith or a tragic victim of political upheaval. Because he fought for the plight of the poor and those who were destitute, tortured and killed, because he preached justice, peace and the love of Jesus, he was canonized on October 14, 2018. *St. Oscar Romero, pray for us and empower us to accept*

what life brings us each day graciously and humbly.

These days of Covid 19 present daily challenges, don't they? The virus is continuing to spread worldwide, death and suffering continue to affect millions. People are deeply divided over the corona virus, gun control, racial disparity, online vs. classroom teaching, money matters and more. Every day it seems constant bickering between scientific evidence and what I perceive to be selfish refusal to accept masks drains everyone emotionally. How do we stay above ground and keep some semblance of joy in our lives? How do we remain faithful to the ways of Jesus in the face of so many challenges? Let's recap Bonaventure's four pathways to humility.

Meditate on God. You can do this easily any time of the day, anywhere. Don't expect yourself to be a monk capable of an hour in private meditation. Just a few minutes of letting God into your heart at your chosen time of day can set you at ease. When one considers the wonders of God around us in creation, we can sit in awe of the majesty and creative power of God. Remember and ruminate on the many times God has forgiven you and I guarantee that you will be humbled in the presence of God.

Remember the humility of Christ. Francis was enamored with the image of the Crucified Christ his entire religious life, beginning with that defining moment before the cross in the chapel of San Damiano. Pray over Philippians 2 and you just may understand the Mystery more clearly. Read one of the four Passion Narratives and you will see how Jesus freely accepted horrid suffering and death. Call to mind all that Jesus did to open the way to Paradise. Ponder the moment you gave birth to a child – the wonder and miracle of life is the power of God within you. If you're a parent and/or grandparent – just watch your babies sleep and marvel at their beauty from God.

Remember where you came from and where you are going in life. Each of us has a unique life journey. By retracing your past footsteps you will come to see the action of God in your journey and appreciate those closest to you. Reflect on the direction your life is taking

right now, no matter your age. We are always moving into the future and when we consider what God has done for us over the years, well, today will seem much less of a threat and just another day with the Lord that we can embrace and enjoy.

Respect others. Isn't it amazing how deeply we feel loved and even respect ourselves more when we revere another human being? Perhaps that's a great indicator that we are all of the same Creator. Differences that have become politicized dwindle away when we are not selfish and see one another as brother, as sister. Read one of the Gospels and see how often Jesus gave of himself with no boundaries, even going beyond boundaries of his country and the Empire itself. Perhaps this just might be a solution to some of the great problems tearing the U.S. to pieces right now.

On his deathbed Francis told the friars: "I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do." Humbly accept each day as a gift on your journey to God. Live life to the fullest and as we hear so often in the Gospels: "do not be afraid."

Thank you for your faithful and generous support of our ministry at St. Peter's, particularly through our recent and very successful Gala! Limited as our service is these days, we never stop praying for you with gratitude each day. May God fill your hearts with peace and everything that is good.

Fr. Bob Hutmacher, o.f.m.

A Church that doesn't provoke any crises, a Gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed: what Gospel is that?

Saint Oscar Romero