



OUR LADY OF THE VALLEY CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Deacon Martin

B Ordinary Time Twenty Fourth Sunday 9.16.18

Isaiah 50: 4c-9a, Psalm 116: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9, James 2: 14-18, Mark 8: 27-35

Dear Monsignor and my dear friends in Christ. Permit me to begin with a short story. Mr. and Mrs. Smith drove in to their driveway late one Saturday night. Mrs. Smith, who was driving, got out of the car and helped Mr. Smith get out from the passenger side. He seemed wobbly and required Mrs. Smith's assistance to get to the door of their home.

A neighbor happened to be awake at the time and observed all of this. The next morning, she shared what she had seen with another neighbor...indicating that Mr. Smith appeared somewhat intoxicated.. The second neighbor shared the news with yet another neighbor and she with another. By the end of the week the news was all over the neighborhood that the Smiths were heavy drinkers and they liked to party into the early hours of the morning.

Today, we have taken the passing on of information to a whole new level. The internet and social media would have had this news about the Smiths shared in minutes instead of days. The truth...the truth about the Smiths was far less sensational and far less scandalous than the assumption-distorted version that went around the neighborhood.

The truth was that Mr. Smith twisted his ankle while visiting friends. But, no one bothered to ask him.

It is in our nature to be judgmental. After all, we are called to make decisions based on good judgement. But doing so carries with it the responsibility to make judgements that lead to the GOOD of other, not to criticizing, condemning or complaining about them. If I have a complaint against someone, the right thing to do is to go to him or her directly and privately and voice my complaint or get clarification. Or, go to a proper authority to investigate and to get at the truth.

Choosing to publicize it in a public forum based on assumptions and without seeking out and speaking privately and directly to the person who is the source of my concern, is both unjust and irresponsible. That is how a sprained ankle can become an alcoholic neighbor. That is how a lack of print space can become an attempt to undermine authority or conceal the full message. In the wake of such lack of judgement there follows dissention, hurt feelings and tarnished reputations. Such actions cause us to take our eyes off of Jesus and we are lesser for it.

St. James in his letter explains rather pointedly that if we are exercising faith properly we are demonstrating it in the GOOD works and the good choices that we make. Faith which is tied to good work...faith in action... does for others what we would want others do for us. Without

good works, there is no faith at all. It is dead, according to St. James. Pope Leo XIII echoes a similar message in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* written in 1891. We all have received much from God and we have an obligation to share what we have been given, no matter what our circumstances. To do less is to lack in the love of which St. James speaks.

Focusing our lives on God's call to place the good of others before ourselves is a lifelong challenge. One that may encounter abuse, rejection and, yes, even suffering. We see that expressed by Isaiah and by St. Mark in today's first reading and Gospel. Yet, that is the challenge to which we are all called. And, accepting that challenge will lead to living a good and holy life albeit sometimes difficult. Following Christ in this life is no less challenging today than it was for Peter. When Peter heard that the road to salvation led to dying on the cross, he impulsively rejected the thought. He would soon come to realize that suffering was necessary. He, too, would experience the cross and find salvation as a faithful follower of Christ. Suffering is a necessary part of a good and holy life. Jesus knew it. Peter found out about it, and we know it.

"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake...will save it." These words of Jesus should guide our efforts to make good choices for the GOOD of others. They should inform our

conscience. An informed conscience will make the decision to put our good intentions into works of mercy much easier, even though it may mean some level of suffering along the way.

Grace provides us with a special kind of joy and a genuine peace that comes from knowing that one's suffering has a purpose...a spiritual purpose...a redemptive purpose. During the dark days of my own experience with cancer, I experienced that unexpected feeling of peace when I dedicated my suffering to my family and joined it to the suffering of Christ in prayer.

In closing, I'd like to say a few words about the Catholic Charities campaign and pledge weekend which begins next week. Catholic Charities has touched my life and lives in my own family. I have two autistic grandchildren. They are brother and sister and two of my daughter's three children. Marie is a beautiful seventeen-year-old. While she is non-verbal and cannot do much for herself, she is very compliant and understands a lot of what she hears. Nathan is twenty-two years old. He is somewhat more verbal and has more capabilities, but he is far more anxious and less compliant. The diocesan Ministry for the Mentally Ill known as Nazareth House is a member of Catholic Charities. It is facilitated by Fr. Pat Cullen and Sister Mary Vernon Gentle. Sister Mary Vernon is the sister to our own Skip Gentle here in the parish. Nathan and Marie have both benefited from this ministry

attending weekly sessions for many years. Through this beautiful ministry both Marie and Nathan have received religious instructions on their level. And, they have both received First Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation.

By now everyone should have received a Catholic Charities pledge card in the mail. Please use it. Be as generous as you can. You may mail it back to the Catholic Charities office or you can drop the envelope with your donation in the basket next Weekend.

Ninety-five percent of the money donated goes to member agencies and organizations. They do a tremendous amount of good throughout the diocese. It is truly *faith in action*. Agencies benefiting from our donations include the Center of Concern in Utah, Alabama which we as a parish support with food donations. Our parish goal this year is \$200,000. It is an opportunity to put others before ourselves, to assist those who have greater needs than our own...to our faith into action.

On behalf of my daughter, my grandchildren, and the less fortunate of the diocese, we thank you for sharing what God has given to you.