

April 22 Homily – “School Mass”
St. Mary’s Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

It was the only time in my life when I broke a bone.

Many kids in my neighborhood broke bones when we were growing up. One neighbor fell out a tree that he was climbing, and he broke his wrist. Another neighbor slipped while ice skating on Mr. Brunner’s pond, and broke his leg.

I avoided those injuries. But I did break a bone – in my hand.

It happened one Saturday. My brother and I were playing street hockey on our driveway with some neighborhood kids. Somehow, we got into an argument about something. My brother called me a bad name, and then he ran around the back of my dad’s truck.

I chased him. I caught up to him. He hit me. I hit him. Then I reared back to punch my brother with my right hand. But he was smart. He ducked. But it was too late – my fist went forward with all my strength, and I punched my dad’s truck!

That’s how I broke a bone in my hand – by punching my dad’s truck. It really hurt. I shouted something angry at my brother – “I hate you!”

That night, my hand hurt so much that I could not sleep. And I kept saying to myself, “I hate my brother.”

The next morning, Sunday morning, we went to church. Mom sat between my brother and me. All through Mass I really wasn’t paying attention. I just kept feeling how much my hand hurt, and whispering to God, “I hate my brother. Please punish him for being mean to me. In Jesus name I pray... Amen.”

Then the priest started preaching, and I still remember the first line in his homily. I remember it because he kept repeating it over and over again. It was a sentence that we just heard in the Gospel of John. Here is the sentence:

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

“God so loved the world.” The priest kept repeating that. My hand kept hurting. I kept praying

that God would punish my brother.

Then the priest added something. This is what he said:

“God so love the world. God loves the *whole* world. Which means that God loves *everyone* in the world.”

And then the priest said the thing I did not want to hear. He said:

“ God loves the whole world. God loves the people you don’t like. God loves the people you hate. God loves the people you’re mad at...maybe even the people who are sitting here in church with you today!”

I felt like he was looking right at me! Could this priest somehow hear my silent prayers, in which I asked God to punish my brother?

God so loves the world. God so loves the whole world.

God loves me (I like that.) But God loves my brother (that is harder to deal with!)

I was fairly young when I heard that homily. I don’t remember much else about it. But that homily created a problem for me. I did not like my brother very much that day. I was blaming him for the fact that I had punched dad’s truck!

I wanted God to punish him. But the Gospel was telling me that God loves my brother. Which means that I should try to love my brother too!

This is a famous passage in John’s Gospel, and it still creates problems for me. The Gospel says that God loves the *world*. Note – it does *not* say that God loves just that *part* of the world where you and I live. John does not say that God loves just Henrico and Short Pump and Goochland.

No. The Gospel says that “God so loved the *world*.” Not just *my* world. Not just Virginia or America. God so loved the *whole world*, that he sent his only son... not to condemn the world... but that the world, the *whole world*, could be saved through him.

Which means (darn it!) that God loves my brother, who ducked! And God loves those people who do things that frustrate me! And God loves the people I see on TV who make me angry. And God loves politicians... every politician.

God has the annoying habit of loving everyone I’ve ever been mad at. God sent Jesus to save

every person who I thought should be punished. God offers forgiveness, hope and healing to every person I've ever wanted to yell at, or call a bad name, or hit with my hand.

Many I be honest with you for a second?

God loves the whole world, and everybody in it. But on many days, *I don't love the whole world!* And I am not sure that I love everybody in the world.

People do things that annoy me, make me mad, disappoint me, frustrate me, make me angry. Does this happen to you?

Maybe it's happening right now in your home? We are spending a lot more time with the same group of people, right?

You are spending a lot of time with your immediate family. Maybe you are able to see some of your neighbors each day.

When we spend lots of time with the same people, doing the same thing, guess what happens – we get on each other's nerves. We discover that none of us is perfect. We are all human. We all make mistakes. We all have habits that make the people around us a little bit frustrated.

It is easy to love the people we see on occasion. It's easy to love the people who do things the way we think they should be done.

But what happens when your brother makes you mad, or your sister gets you upset, or your parents make you angry, or your neighbors get on your nerves?

What happens when you want to punch a truck?

Well, the Gospel says that God sent Jesus to save us. To save you. To save me.

So when I am ready to punch a truck, or say a bad word, or loudly tell someone that I think they are a jerk, I try to step back and say "Jesus, save me."

"Jesus to save me - from myself. Save me from my selfishness. Save me from my self-centeredness. Save me from the judgments I pass. save me from my anger."

"Jesus to save me from my lack of patience with the folks who are closest to me."

Even now, now that I am an adult, I still go back to that Sunday when I was sitting in the pew,

with my hand hurting, and my heart reminding me that I really did not like my brother at the time.”

And the priest said what I needed to hear: “God loves the whole world... including that person in the pew that you are angry at.”

That is one way that Jesus saves me. He reminds me that he loves me. And he reminds me that he loves even the people I'm mad at. And if Jesus can love them... well then, maybe so can I !!!

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