

## 2018 – Year B – 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

You may have heard this past week that fashion designer Kate Spade had committed suicide. Her family later disclosed that Ms. Spade was suffering from mental illness. Even as I have begun preparing this homily it has just been reported that Anthony Bourdain, chef, author and television personality, has also committed suicide. We do not have any further information, but the issue of mental illness has been in the news in a variety of situations. We have heard the term “mental illness” used in the aftermath of many of the recent mass shootings that have occurred in the past couple of years. There was recently an attack on people in Toronto, Canada that said the attacker was suffering from “mental illness.” What is “mental illness” and why has it seemed to have been the cause of death in recent years?

The use of the term “mental illness” is actually not correct. The correct way to address the condition that people suffer from is in the context of mental health. Mental health is the ability to cope with the transitions that occur in life, traumatic experiences and losses in a way that allows your personality to remain intact and even contribute to emotional growth. That is surely a mouthful.

Mental health covers a variety of conditions and situations that people experience in their lives and helps them to address the situation and learn to deal with the effects. There is not one issue that affects all people that have problems with their mental health. One of the many issues of mental health is depression. Throughout life people experience changes, both physically and emotionally, which have to be dealt with. These changes can lead a person to either isolate themselves or to hide the underlying feeling they are experiencing. The issue of

bullying, especially among teenagers, is another problem that affects a persons' mental health. Teenagers are already dealing with great changes in their lives and the additional challenge of bullying can bring on pressures too great for a teenage to handle without seeking professional help. The issue of mental health also covers cases of post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. We hear about PSTD most often in regard to military veterans who have experienced the horrors of war and lived through it.

In Jesus' time people also acted in manner that today we would classify as a mental health problem, but they were instead said to be possessed by a demon. Mark recounts how Jesus' own family and the scribes describe the reason for Jesus' actions, but from different sides. Jesus' relatives say that he is "out of his mind" and set out to save him from himself. They believe that his actions show that he is not acting in a "normal" way and must be taken care of so that he does not hurt himself or others. The motivation of his family is for his own good, but it is misplaced.

The scribes see Jesus performing good deeds and accuse him of being possessed by demons. They do not see the good that Jesus is doing among the people but only see a threat to their own authority and power. Since they cannot match Jesus' works they seek to act against the underlying reason for the actions.

Jesus has to provide a correction to both misunderstandings of his actions. Jesus' outward actions reveal that he is driven by the mission of healing people that he has received from God, His Father. Jesus is not possessed by some demon of Satan, as the scribes accuse Jesus of, but by the Holy Spirit. Those who recognize the true source of Jesus' mission of healing will come to

believe in Jesus and be able to have their sins forgiven. They will also come to form a new family of spiritual believers. Jesus does not turn away from his human family but states that his family will now include those who do the will of God, his Father.

Jesus came into the world to remove the emptiness felt by people because they did not feel close to the God who loves them unconditionally. Jesus' mission is about healing people and repairing their relationship with God and each other.

When we talk about the issues of mental health and suicide we are doing the healing work that Jesus leaves us with. In order to help others we first have to realize the extent of the problem. Every day over 120 people commit suicide. An average of 22 veterans commit suicide every day. In the last 20 years the rate of suicide in the United States has increased 25%. These numbers are an open secret because we are uncomfortable about talking of suicide, but unless we talk about it we cannot address the issue. We need to be more like Jesus and reach out to those who are in need and aid them in feeling more connected or to seek the professional assistance that will guide them through the situations they are trying to cope with.

Doing the will of God makes us sisters and brothers in Jesus' spiritual family. As members of this family we are responsible for bringing God's words of healing to a world that needs to hear the message of God's unconditional love.