

HOMILY ~ SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

MAY 13/14, 2023

This morning I want to share with you a poem from the book *All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten* by Robert Fulghum.

Most of what I really need
To know about how to live
And what to do and how to be
I learned in kindergarten.
Wisdom was not at the top
Of the graduate school mountain,
But there in the sandpile at Sunday school.
These are the things I learned:
Share everything.
Play fair.
Don't hit people.
Put things back where you found them.
Clean up your own mess.
Don't take things that aren't yours.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
Wash your hands before you eat.
Flush.
Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
Live a balanced life –
Learn some and think some
And draw and paint and sing and dance
And play and work everyday some.
Take a nap every afternoon.
When you go out into the world,
Watch out for traffic,
Hold hands and stick together.
Be aware of wonder.

We did learn these things when we were very young, but I do disagree with one thing. I did not learn most of these things in Kindergarten. I learned most of these things from my mother. Today on Mother's Day, I think we need to be grateful to all our Mothers for all of the many things they taught us when we were young and all of the love and support they have continued to give us as we get older. All of their acts of loving kindness over the years.

In the First Reading today, we hear about the conversion of the people of Samaria. The Samaritans and the Jewish people were bitter enemies for many years; but when Philip began to teach them about Jesus, he broke the rift. What was Philip teaching the people about Jesus? He was teaching that Jesus is God and how he calls us to love and serve one another. He was not teaching them about dogma and doctrine, none of that had been developed yet. Sometimes I think we make following Jesus too complicated. Living a Christian life is not about an intellectual system of laws. It is about living a life of loving kindness toward one another. I guess Jesus' message is a little more complicated than that, but I think that is where it starts. So let's talk a little about loving kindness today.

Did you ever wonder why people sometimes see the opportunity to do an act of loving kindness toward a stranger and fail to do so? Psychologists used to apply the *Bystander Affect*. Unless you have a particular duty to help someone, you think someone else will intervene; and the more bystanders there are, the less likely you will intervene. Recent studies indicate that this is not true. There are other reasons why people do not intervene. In general, people want to do acts of loving kindness, but they are afraid they are not competent to do so. People are afraid that they may not do the perfect right thing, they may feel awkward, they may not know what to say, they may be uncomfortable doing it, they may be rejected, they may make someone else feel uncomfortable. It is not so much that they do not want to do an act of kindness, but they are afraid that it will be unwelcome or they may not do it perfectly. A couple of examples from my own life. I am much more likely to stop and help someone if I am wearing a collar than if I am not. I feel that the person will feel less threatened and more comfortable if a priest reaches out to them. There are friends that I did not see or talk with during COVID. I felt funny calling them because so much time had gone by. I pushed myself to make the call, and I am glad I did. They were happy to hear from me. Another example, I was at the airport waiting for my flight. There was a man that was crying sitting all by himself. I watched this go on for quite a while, and I did not go up and talk to him. I thought maybe he would be embarrassed that I saw him crying, maybe I could not help him with whatever he was crying about, maybe I would say the wrong thing. I never went over to help him, and I still regret this today. I have never regretted reaching out to someone with loving kindness.

People also underestimate how much the receiver appreciates the loving kindness. The person who receives the loving kindness is delighted to receive the loving kindness, not so much because of what was given or what was done, but because someone tried to do something nice for them. Another example. A number of years ago, I locked my keys in my car at work. I got out of work at about 6:00 in the evening, and it had been snowing all day. I called AAA to come and let me in; and they told me that it would be several hours because of the weather. After a while, a man stopped and asked me what the matter was. I told him that I locked my keys in the car. He got out and tried to open the car with a coat hanger. This was in the days when you could still do that. He was unable to do it; but about 30 years later, I still remember his act of kindness. We appreciate acts of loving kindness not so much because of what the person did, but because they reached out to us.

We also do not always recognize the ripple effect of our loving acts of kindness. When someone receives an act of loving kindness, they are much more likely to pay it forward. Example. There was a woman at the drive-thru at Starbucks at 7:00 in the morning who paid for her own coffee and the coffee of the person behind her. The next person paid it forward. In fact, 378 people paid it forward before the chain was broken. We can create a cycle of loving kindness.

So, reach out and do the act of loving kindness and do not be so concerned about your competence. Even if you do the wrong thing with good intentions, the person on the receiving end will appreciate kindness; and you may be starting a whole chain of people paying it forward. Do it. Your mother will be proud.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim