

## HOMILY 14<sup>TH</sup> SUN OT YRB 2018

This week I was reading some letters that children wrote to God. I want to share one with you today. “Dear God. I have doubts about you sometimes. Sometimes I really believe. Like when I was four and hurt my arm and you healed it up fast. But my question is, if you could do this, why don’t you stop all of the bad in the world? Like War. Like diseases. Like famine. Like drugs. And there are problems in other people’s neighborhoods too. I’ll try to believe more. Ian (age 10).” Out of the mouths of babes! I think all of us have asked similar questions at times. Why doesn’t God just take care of everything for us? He certainly has the power to do so. Why does God act the way that he does in our lives. I am not certain why God acts the way that he does, but the God who created the whole universe, created all of us, and sustains the universe all of us every day must know what he is doing. I trust that the all knowing and all powerful God knows better than me.

In the second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians that we just heard today, he talks about the thorn in the flesh that he is afflicted with by an angel of Satan. Scripture scholars have speculated over the years about what this “thorn of the flesh” was. They have speculated that it was epilepsy, headaches, vision problems, depression. They also have speculated that it may have been persistent temptations such as lust or an addiction. They have also speculated that it could have been “a thorn in the side,” like an obnoxious persistent opponent. The truth is that we just do not know, but it was likely something out of his control. He wanted to be relieved of this affliction. He begged the Lord to relieve him of this affliction three times, and when he realized that it was not going to happen, he accepted it, looked for the good that came from it, and concluded that “when I am weak, then I am strong.

In the beginning, God created us to live in total happiness with him for eternity. There was no evil in the world. But when we sinned, that all changed. Through human beings evil came into the world and we had to learn to live moral lives. We had to learn to grow in wisdom. We had to learn how

to love. In order to learn how to live a moral life, we must be free to live an immoral life. In order to grow in wisdom, we need to be free to choose to reject wisdom. In order to become better lovers we need to be free not to love. We look at these things as virtuous, but how virtuous would they be if we had no choice. We would be like trees. Trees grow leaves but we do not see this as particularly virtuous because they are not free to do otherwise. They grow leaves just because that is what they do. Think about it. The most growth that has taken place in our lives usually comes from the thorns we experience. It comes from the difficulties we live through.

There is a story told of a Renaissance artist who made the world's most prized vases. A visitor came to observe his method. After laboring for weeks with a piece of clay – firing it, painting it, baking it – he placed it on a pedestal for inspection. The visitor was in awe of this thing of unspeakable beauty. But the artist was not finished. In a shocking dramatic moment, he lifted the vase over his head and dashed it to the floor breaking it into hundreds of pieces. He quietly reconnected all of the pieces painting the edges with pure gold. When he was finished he had an imperfect but beautiful work of art. The story did not say how the artist first discovered this technique. I wonder is he accidentally broke one of his vases, and instead of just giving up on it and throwing away the pieces, he put it back together the best way he knew how and created a masterpiece.

The truth is, we all have these thorns of the flesh and it is what we do with them that is important. We can give up, or we can try to make something good out of them. That is how we grow in virtue. That is how we grow in love.