

HOMILY 21ST SUN OT YRC 2019

How many of you remember George Forman? He is probably best known today for the George Foreman Grill, but he is a two-time former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, an Olympic gold medalist and an ordained Baptist minister. He won his second heavyweight world championship at age 45, the oldest man to win this title. He said that when he started his comeback he had to get rid of “some excess George.” In 10 years he went from 220 to 315 lbs, and it wasn’t all muscle. As part of his exercise regime he started running. He could not make it around the block without stopping a few times to catch his breath. He said that people laughed when they saw him and no one believed that he could make a comeback. With regular exercise and a proper diet he got down to 229 lbs. He said: “The flab was fun to put on but hard to take off. I would have never won the title if I hadn’t first gotten rid of that extra weight.”

In the Gospel reading today we hear: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.” Striving to enter through the narrow gate is a life-long process, and we have to be in spiritual shape to be strong enough. To get into spiritual shape takes the same type of discipline as getting into physical shape. George Forman had to exercise and eat right every day to get in shape. Getting into spiritual shape means coming to Mass every weekend. I must admit that some mornings I get up and I just do not feel like going to Mass but I tell myself: “Jim, you are the Pastor. You have to get up and celebrate Mass.” And I also must admit that I have never been sorry that I did. We also need to pray regularly, just you and Jesus. When I started praying every day my life changed. And you can probably think of 100 other things to do with your time. It takes discipline. After a short time it became habit for me and I just do it, and I know that it is the most important thing I do all day. And we all have to get rid of some of our excess spiritual flab or baggage to get through the narrow gate, hatred, greed, jealousy, lust, apathy, just to name a few. That takes

discipline as well. We may get some momentary pleasure putting on that spiritual flab, but in the long run you just end up spiritually bankrupt.

In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that we should see the suffering in our lives as discipline from the God who loves us. A parent punishes a child to teach them an important lesson out of love. And usually discipline involves learning the consequences of things that we have done wrong. Now I do not believe³ that God inflicts the suffering we have in our lives. God just loves us. But through his permissive will he allows things to happen. We all have trials and suffering in our lives. St. Paul tells us that at first these trials bring pain but later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Working through the trials in our lives is part of the discipline we need to be spiritually healthy. Everything we do in our lives that is worth doing takes work and discipline. The accomplishments we achieve in our lives come through hard work. And God does not waste anything. God always brings good out of bad situations if we let him. “I got over my selfishness when someone who was ill was depending upon me.” “I beat my addiction and now I can help someone else beat theirs.” “When I got cancer I learned to appreciate all blessing I have and how to live each day to the fullest.” “When my mother got sick it was hard to take care of her every day, but we shared things that we never would have shared otherwise. I look at it as a blessed time now.” “I worked really hard to have a successful business and now I can do a lot of good with the money I earned.” “It was devastating when I lost my job and could not find another one but I learned how little I really needed to live and how unimportant all the stuff is. And it gave me the time I needed to figure out what God was calling me to do. I have never been happier in my life.” These are all things that people have told me.

Are you going to make it through the narrow gate? You cannot slip by on someone else’s coat tails. You have to do it yourself with God’s help. Are you ready to start spiritual training? It is not always easy but definitely worthwhile. It makes life worth living in this world and the next.