

## HOMILY 23<sup>rd</sup> SUN OT YRC 2019

The Washington Post has been doing a story about the opioid epidemic based upon information released from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) from 2006 to 2012. During that time 76 billion pills were produced. The DEA tracks every pill that has been manufactured. Only 3 manufacturers produced 88% of the pills so they knew the extent of the problem and made billions of dollars of the drug. After the drugs are manufactured they get to the pharmacies through distributors. 6 distributors handled 75% of the pills, so they knew the magnitude of the problem as well. One of the distributors sent an email to a manufacturer that said: "They are addicted to these drugs. We need more." The manufacturer responded: "They are like Doritos. Keep eating. We will make more." They made a joke out of the problem. The people who work for the distributors get a bonus based upon sales. One individual's bonus went from 26,000 one year to 110,000 a couple years later because of the sale of opioids. Many pharmacies filled prescriptions. Some refused to fill prescriptions if the people were addicted or if the prescriptions appeared to be phony. If the same person is getting an excessive number of pills they are probably either addicted or selling the drugs. Particular counties were saturated with the drug, and this correlated with a marked increase in overdose deaths. Southern Florida was one of the saturated areas. They actually had "Pain Clinics" where a doctor would give you a cursory exam and then they would fill the prescription next door. They even advertized on billboards along I-75, "Pain Clinic next exit." People were flocking to Florida to get the drugs. You just paid the pharmacy a few dollars for the drug but you could sell them on the street for \$30. There were particular flights to Florida called the Oxi Express. What were all of these people doing? And we tend to blame the addict. They have a disease. Look at how many people are benefiting from their disease. We cannot re-victimize the victim.

In the Gospel reading today Jesus says: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” When we think of Jesus carrying the cross we immediately think of him carrying the cross that he was crucified on, as well we should, but that was not the first cross that he carried. Jesus was always very clear about why he was on earth in a human body. He came to redeem us. He used all of his charisms, gifts and talents to help us. It was not easy to always be reaching out and helping the poor and the vulnerable and marginalized. They are not always a lot of fun to be around. And during his public ministry he was pretty much homeless traveling around from town to town. And could have made a great deal of money based upon his healing powers alone, but he did not. I am going to ask you to look at carrying the cross a little differently today. I want you to think about using your charisms, gifts and talents to help others. This is not always easy.

Look at the people involved in the drug industry. When the drug manufacturers use their charisms, gifts and talents to help others they can develop and produce life saving drugs. Pharmacists can help us use drugs properly and effectively and can help us to improve our quality of life. Physicians have the gift of healing. As long as they are using their charisms and gifts to help others they do great things. When they lose sight of that is when they get into trouble.

Jesus also tells us in the Gospel reading that we have to think about the consequences of what we are doing before we do it. He gives the example of building a tower or going to war. We must always be mindful of the consequences of our actions. The people who are feeding the opioid epidemic, are they thinking about the consequences of their actions? If they are, how can they sleep at night?

We need to carry our crosses by using our charisms, gifts and talents to help others, and this will mean something different for each of us. Our crosses are as unique as our fingerprints. Not only is it the right thing to do, it is the surest way to fulfillment and joy in this world and the next.