

HOMILY 13th SUNDAY In Ordinary Time

June 28, 2020

How many of you know Justin Bieber? He found fame and fortune as a pop singer at a very young age. He had it all; at least according to what our culture tells us is important. But this is what he wrote on social media: “I found myself at age 18 with no skills in the real world, with millions of dollars and access to whatever I wanted. I started doing pretty heavy drugs at 19 and abused all my relationships. I became resentful, disrespectful to women, and angry. I became distant to everyone who loved me, and I was hiding behind, a shell of a person that I had become. By 20, I made every bad decision you could have thought of.” He has worked hard to turn his life around since then. He credited the support of friends and his Christian faith with helping turn his life around. This is what he wrote on social media: “All this is to say even when the odds are against you, keep fighting. Jesus loves you. Be kind today, be bold today and love people today, not by your standards but by God’s perfect unfailing love.”

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus says: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Do you think Justin Bieber thought he found his life at a very early age? He had it all so to speak. You could say that if you think the fame and fortune is the most important thing in life. But it is not, so he had to lose his life to find it. When he reconnected with his faith, with Jesus, he found his life. Now he is still rich and famous, there is nothing wrong with that, but he had to put Jesus at the center of his life to find his life. Now most of us will not have the rich and famous problem, but where we get into trouble is when something takes on greater value than it should have in your life. It

could be a job. It could be a dream house or material possessions. It could be your investment portfolio. It could be a quest for power or prestige. When something takes on more importance than it should have, we lose.

In the Gospel reading Jesus also says: “whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.” This pandemic is presenting us with some crosses. Shutting everything down here at St. Edith has been a very big cross for me. Telling vulnerable people not to come to church is difficult. I am not sounding very welcoming right now and that goes against everything I believe Church should be. I had a call from a parishioner recently. He said: “Fr. Jim, I am 92 years old and am on dialysis. My wife is 89 years old and has a heart condition. Can we come to church?” I know how much they wanted to come but I had to say that I did not think it was safe for them to come. I have had children call me and say: “Will you please call my parents and tell them it is ok not to come to church. It is not safe for them. They will listen to you; they are not listening to me.” It is difficult, but I make the call. We wanted to have the most welcoming parish in the Archdiocese of Detroit and that is just not happening now. I pray about it every day and I keep getting the same response, keep people as safe as possible. This has been really hard for me and I know it has been very hard for many of you.

In the Gospel reading Jesus also says: “whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple – amen I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.” Sometimes it is the little things that matter, like a cup of cold water. That is the way I am looking at wearing a mask. It really is a very little thing. And wearing a mask is not an individual rights issue, it is not a matter of personal choice, it is a

public health issue. The CDC says that wearing a cloth mask slows the spread of the coronavirus. So wear the mask.

We need to stay focused upon what is important right now, and that is loving and serving one another. It is about keeping each other as safe as possible. We need to do this a little while longer so that we can all be safe. This is the cross that we have to carry right now. And be careful. I do not want to think that staying home for 3 months was a waste of 3 months.