

HOMILY ~ 14th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
JULY 3/4, 2021

I do not always sleep well at night. This has been particularly true during COVID. One of the things that helped me is listening to podcasts. You can download them on to your phone and listen to them whenever you want. So when I wake up at 3:00 in the morning, I listen to a podcast. It distracts me from the COVID dream that woke me up or from whatever I am thinking about, and I eventually fall back to sleep and I learn something in the process. One of the podcasts that was recommended to me was a podcast by a Buddhist psychologist. I thought, well this will be interesting, but I kept an open mind. I was surprised how much the wisdom of Buddhism was consistent with Catholicism. It is mainly just a different way of approaching the concept. You know there are many doors to the same room and, in many cases, I found this different perspective helpful. I do not think I will become a Buddhist anytime soon, but I am glad that I kept an open mind.

What happened with Jesus in the Gospel reading today? Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and people were amazed at his wisdom. At least that is what was happening initially. Then someone recognized him. Isn't this Jesus the carpenter's son? We know him. He is totally uneducated. There is nothing special about him, and they took offense at him. Now we are not sure exactly what the teaching was that Jesus was offering them because it does not tell us in the Gospel reading, but I do not think the message changed drastically after Jesus was recognized. Once they recognized him, they judged him and they dismissed his teaching. And because they were not open to him, he could not perform any mighty deeds there. Can you imagine having the opportunity to learn directly from Jesus and then just closing your mind to his message? I think we do that sometimes. Jesus is sometimes trying to perform mighty deeds in our lives, and he cannot do that because we are not open to him.

Sometimes Jesus tries to communicate with us directly, and we just do not want to hear it. Sometimes Jesus tries to communicate to us through other people, and we judge them negatively and dismiss their wisdom. I could have done that. A Buddhist psychologist, really? What could she teach me? Sometimes great wisdom comes from unexpected people. I worked for several years as a counselor at Crossroads with homeless and near homeless people, and I think I learned a lot more from them than they learned from me. They had an honesty and a way of cutting through all of the bologna, if you know what I

mean. Who have you judged and dismissed because they were not an expert, because of their sex, because of their race, because they do not have enough education, because of a group they belong to? What is the wisdom you are missing?

In the Second Reading, St. Paul tells us that he had a thorn in the flesh that was given to him by an angel of Satan. We are not sure what that was. Scripture scholars have been speculating that it may have been epilepsy, or a physical condition or a mental condition. But the truth is we just do not know, and apparently it really bothered him. I think we all have at least one thorn in the flesh or a series of thorns in the flesh, something that we cannot quite resolve on our own. People sometimes tell me that they have been completing the same sin over and over again, and they are discouraged by that. This is probably your weakness. This is probably your thorn. Don't give up, seek God's grace. We need to acknowledge the thorn and allow Jesus to help us, allow Jesus to perform a mighty deed. Many things we can solve on our own, however, for me the list of things I can handle on my own is getting smaller and smaller. Maybe it is a physical or mental condition. Maybe this condition is not going to go away, but we need to learn how to continue to live with it. Maybe it is an addiction. Maybe it is a failure to forgive or to reach out to reconcile. Maybe it is something from the past that we need to stop ruminating about. Maybe we need a push to stop procrastinating. If not today, when? If you cannot figure it out yourself, maybe you need a different perspective. I try and really listen to everyone who talks to me. I do not always agree, but I really try to keep an open mind and try not to judge the book by its cover so to speak. If you need a different perspective, maybe you should at least try to listen to the Buddhist psychologist.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim