

HOMILY ~ AUGUST 28/29, 2021
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb? “Change? My grandfather donated those light bulbs!” We do not like change, even if it is change for the better, even if what we did in the past does not make sense anymore, we do not like change.

In the First Reading, things were about to change for the people of Israel. The Lord had led the people to the Promised Land. The Lord took care of them during the journey, he gave them food when they were hungry, he gave them water when they were thirsty, and he parted the Red Sea when they needed to escape the Egyptians. The Lord was working through Moses, and the people knew this. The people were about to enter the Promised Land, and their lives were going to change drastically. Moses was not going with them. He was going to die before they entered the Promised Land. The people would no longer have Moses to count on. Moses was afraid that when the people entered the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, they would no longer be dependent upon the Lord in the same way. They would have to rethink their relationship with the Lord. They would have to recognize that they need the Lord in good times and in bad. Having a relationship with God is a lot like having relationships with people. What if in your close relationships with others you only worked on the relationships in times of trouble. You would not have much of a relationship would you? It is the same thing with our relationship with God. If you have a relationship with him in good times, it will see you through the bad times. I talk to people in times of trouble and they sometimes say: “I want to pray, but I do not know how.” You can learn to pray in times of trouble, but it is more difficult. You will not be starting out with a strong faith.

Psychologists tell us why we are resistant to change. We frequently hold on to old ideas and old decisions, even if they do not make sense anymore. We cause problems in our lives because we do not want to go back and rethink past decisions. One of the reasons for that is because it is too much work to go back and rethink old decisions. It is easier to hold on to old views than to grapple with new ones. “I have made my decision, and I am sticking with it.” Secondly, we do not like to admit that we are wrong. When someone questions old ideas, we tend to promote and protect our point of view; or we marshal arguments to prove the other person wrong; or we look only at evidence that supports our old ideas. None of these things are helpful. What we really need to do is consider the new point of view with an open mind, rethink the situation and change our point of view if it makes good sense. People with a scientific mind like it when they find they were wrong. It means they learned something new.

In the Gospel Reading Jesus was trying to change the point of view of the Scribes and Pharisees regarding the hand washing ritual. First of all you have to understand that it was not so much about hygiene, it was a ritual that originally applied

only to the priests. There were all kinds of rules including how much water was to be used and how far up the arm you were to wash. We continue to have a hand washing ritual at the end of the Preparation of the Gifts. That is not about hygiene, it is part of the ritual. At some point, it was decided that the ritual made the priests more holy; and since everyone is called to holiness, everyone should participate in the hand washing ritual. Jesus is pointing out that this is not making anyone holier. There are other ways to promote holiness, but this was not one of them. He was trying to get them to rethink what they were requiring the people to do. But the Scribes and Pharisees were not willing to do that.

In connection with change, I want to talk a little about the vaccine. I know this is a sensitive issue for many, and I am not judging, blaming or shaming; but if you made a decision months ago, it may be time to rethink the decision. The vaccine has now been fully approved by the FDA. Scientists all over the world have been studying the vaccine, and we have learned a lot. Scientists have been criticized for flip flopping back and forth, but they rethink and change their recommendations when they have new evidence. That is what we all should be doing. Doctors and nurses that are treating COVID patients in the hospital have told me that when people are very sick in the hospital, some say that they are sorry they did not get the vaccine and want to get it now. You cannot wait until you get sick to get the vaccine. You cannot get it when you are sick. I cannot tell you what is right for you, but getting the vaccine was the right thing for me. I felt liberated when I got it. I now feel confident that in the unlikely event that I get sick, I will not have to be hospitalized and I will not die of COVID. I am suggesting that you rethink your decision. If you consulted your doctor, and they advised you to hold off on getting the vaccine at some time in the past; maybe it is time to check back with him or her and see if that is still a good decision. If you have not talked to your doctor, maybe you should. They understand the results of the studies better than we do. Talk to people you trust and respect that have gotten the vaccine. Listen to them with an open mind. Do not stick with an old decision without rethinking it. You can change your mind. It might be the best thing to do.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim