

HOMILY ~ MARCH 19-20, 2022 THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

How are you feeling these days? Are you feeling kind of “blah,” kind of “meh?” When I ask people, I get a lot of “hanging in there” or “I’m ok.” I think that is where COVID has left many of us. Two years ago, we were feeling fear, fight, flight or freeze because of COVID. We may have been feeling anxiety or depression, or we may have been grieving what we had lost. Some pretty strong feelings have gone away over time. I think we hoped that one day we would turn on the TV and hear Dr. Anthony Fauci say: “COVID is over. We can go back to our normal way of life immediately.” And then we would have great rejoicing. But we now know that is not going to happen. So we have been left with “blah” or “meh.” It turns out that psychologists have a term for that feeling. Psychologists call it *languishing*, and they define it as a sense of emptiness or stagnation.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus taught us two lessons. First of all, we learn that our time is limited here, and it is precious. Things happen that we do not expect and that we do not cause, and our time is up. He gives us two examples. In the first, some people are worshiping in the temple; suddenly soldiers come in and instantly and brutally kill them without warning. Their time was up. In the second example, the tower of Siloam falls on 18 people; and they are killed instantly in this freak accident. Their time was up. We know intellectually that this could be our last day on earth, but we do not always believe it. We would rather believe that we will live to be at least 100 years old, so we do not have to think about dying because that is a long way off. But we know that this is probably not true. If time is limited and precious, we may not want to spend a lot of time languishing. The second lesson in today’s Gospel is the parable of the fig tree that has not produced fruit in three years. The land owner tells the gardener to dig it out and get rid of it. The gardener convinces the land owner to give the tree one more year. I think the fig tree is languishing, “blah” or “meh,” living but not producing a whole lot. Maybe we do not want to stay languishing too long because our time is running out.

The thing is, if we are grieving, fearful, anxious or depressed, we are more likely to identify that we need to do something about it. Not necessarily so with languishing. So the first thing we need to do is to recognize that languishing is a thing; and we do not want to spend too much time there, and there are things we can do to get ourselves out of languishing. Once you realize that languishing is a thing, you will also realize that you have been languishing before and got out of it. What did you do to get out of languishing in the past? You may want to do that again.

Psychologists have three suggestions to help you to stop languishing. The first one is *mastery*. Start with what God wants you to do, the direction that God wants you to move toward. It does not need to be something big; in fact, I think it is way more important to discern the little decisions we make each day through prayer, and these little decisions form the big ones. Achieve something today that is in line with God's plan for you. It may be just one step that leads to a bigger goal. One of the things that I have suggested for almsgiving is instead of giving money, do an act of kindness for someone. Decide what you are going to do, who you are going to do it for and make a plan to carry it out. At the end of the day, you will feel good about what you mastered.

The next suggestion involves being present or *mindfulness* to what you are doing in the moment. Focus your attention on one thing at a time. If you are at work or at a meeting, give it your full attention. If you are spending time with your spouse, your children or with friends, give them your full attention. When you are playing, give that your full attention. We used to hear a lot about multi-tasking. Studies show that if you are multitasking, you are doing a mediocre job at best with each task. Maybe that is all the tasks are worth, but maybe we want to do a better job with some of them. Studies have shown that on average, we check email 74 times per day. That alone will keep you distracted all day. Studies also show that on average we switch tasks every ten minutes. Can you accomplish great things in ten minutes? We are not multi-taskers; we are serial processors, one thing at a time. If we are going to accomplish things that are better than "meh," we need to give full attention to one thing at a time.

The third suggestion is *mattering*. Do something that matters to someone. If you give your undivided attention to your spouse, your children or to friends, it is going to matter to them. If you perform an act of kindness for someone, it will matter to them. If you are going to be involved in random acts of kindness, you need to be very purposeful about it. With all of the isolation of COVID, and the way we are relating to others today, we have fewer opportunities to happen upon ways to perform random acts of kindness.

Life is too short and precious to spend too much time languishing. Let's try and move out of it. Ask Jesus, he will help you.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim