

Homily: 4th SUN – ORD C

There was an article in the Denver Post about a High school senior who just received his 5th college rejection letter...He was so upset that he decided he had had enough & so he sat down & wrote this letter:

“Dear Admissions Department: Thank for your letter of April 16. After careful consideration, I regret to inform you that I am unable to accept your refusal to admit me to your college. This year I have been fortunate to receive a large number of rejection letters. With so many rejections, I find that I just cannot accept them all...Despite your school’s outstanding reputation for rejecting applicants, I am afraid that I will have to reject your rejection. And so I will report to the scheduled freshman orientation on September 7th.”...Signed: Regretfully yours, Kevin P. O’Connor.

As the story goes, the admissions committee got together to discuss Kevin’s letter, & would you believe they decided to admit him?... They said that they “couldn’t afford to let one like that get away.” ...This story may be true...but we all know the world doesn’t usually work that way...Rejection is real,.. Rejection hurts...It makes you feel like you’re not worthy, like you’re not good enough...If you haven’t guessed by now, the theme of my homily is “Rejection”...or more specifically, “Rejection Stinks!”

All of us have experienced rejection, ..& I’ll bet most - if not all - of us agree that it does stink.For me, it is one of the worst feelings I’ve ever felt...I call it the UN-feeling because being rejected by some person or group can make us feel UNwanted or UNloved or UNworthy or UNaccepted or UNrespected or UNappreciated...& a whole list of other UNs...All of us can recall times when we dealt with some pretty hurtful rejection...One of my worst was when my first real girlfriend told me to take a hike...I was devastated...I thought my life was over...& I’d never be happy again...As it turned out,...I was wrong...I ended up with her best friend & we’ve been together over 50 yrs...But, at the time, that rejection really did hurt...There are all kinds of reasons why people are rejected...Some are rejected because of their looks or how they dress...Some for what they believe...Others because their employer says they are no longer needed...Some for the color of their skin...Some because they’re from a another country. ...Others because they’re too old...or too young...or too handicapped...or the wrong sex. ...Some are rejected because they’re spouse has found someone else...Others are rejected because someone refuses to forgive them...The reasons are many,...but the results are always the same: PAIN!...So the question is: what does our Christian faith have to say about this difficult human experience?

Well, for one thing, it offers us a Savior who understands what it feels like to be rejected...We can pretty much say that His entire earthly ministry suffered rejection...In today’s Gospel Jesus gets His first taste of rejection in His home town of Nazareth from the friends & neighbors He grew up with...& lived with....At first His preaching in the synagogue was welcomed...The people were amazed...But things quickly went south when He reminded the congregation of the times when God’s prophets had ministered to people other than the Jews...He challenged their status as the chosen people by telling them that God’s love & mercy were meant for all of God’s children, not just them...On hearing this, the crowd turned into an angry mob, ...& drove Jesus out of town, even tried to kill Him, but He managed to escape...An extreme case of rejection. One we hopefully will never experience.

Last August my granddaughter & I were shopping in K-Mart, and as we usually do on our shopping trips, we were horsing around trying to make each other laugh...As we walked by the beer displays in the main aisle, I broke into some really goofy expressions that caused Karen to start laughing uncontrollably....She was laughing so hard that she doubled up, dropped to the ground, lied there curled up in spasms of silent laughter...like she was having a convulsion.

...There I was, trying to get her to get up because I didn't want anyone to see her lying in the aisle & think something was wrong...Now, of course, wouldn't you know it,...a woman comes walking toward us.. sees Karen on the ground, & before I can explain the situation to her,...she says, in a serious tone, "Oh, I've been there."... Now, I'm not sure what that woman meant,..but I'm guessing she was referring to a time in her life when she had been knocked to the ground – not from laughing – but from some big trouble that had brought her to her knees...and so her words, "Oh, I've been there. "

"I've been there."...You know, there's nothing in any of the Gospels that suggests that Jesus ever said those words,...but I can't help believing that whenever we are pierced by the sword of rejection,...whenever we feel the sting of rejection...we can draw comfort...we can be consoled knowing that –unlike any of the other great religions - we have a God who has experienced what we're experiencing...felt what we are feeling...dealt with what we are dealing with...I guess what I am saying is this: When the pain of rejection hurts so much we can't even think straight...when we feel worthless...when we feel like crap...because that person or group or organization that we want so much to like us...to accept us...to see good in our ideas, ...to respect our values...to love us...to want us... has told us NO!...maybe even NO, NEVER!

When the pain of rejection is so deep that we can't see past the hurt, can't see any hope that it will ever get better,...this is when we have to fix our eyes on the cross....because...my friends, ...what we will see on that cross,...THAT'S REJECTION!...THAT'S REJECTION!...The most worthy, most deserving,...most perfect human being who ever lived...rejected in a way none of us will ever experience... Rejected by His enemies... rejected by His friends...rejected by His neighbors. ...rejected by those He helped... And if we keep our gaze fixed on our crucified Savior...& let our hearts for a moment turn away from our pain...& focus on His...maybe, just maybe, we will hear Him whisper to us, "I know what you're going through...I've been there...I know it looks pretty bad right now...but trust me this isn't the end of your story...no more than this cross was the end of mine....Trust me, it's going to get better...Trust me."

What else does our faith tell us about rejection?...It says that rejection is something each of us has to bear just as Jesus himself had to bear...But we can bear it knowing that we will never – absolutely never – be rejected by God...St. Paul tells us in Rom 8:38 that nothing in all of creation will separate us from the love of God... the unconditional, unfailing, unending love Paul described in our 2nd reading....In John 6:37, Jesus assures us: "I will not reject anyone who comes to me."

Some of us might think that our goal is to be accepted by God...But that is totally wrong...God's acceptance is not our goal...It is the starting point...We don't have to earn it...or achieve it in any way...It was given to us before we were born...In our 1st reading the prophet Jeremiah heard the Lord say, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."...He's saying the same to you & me...We came into this world enveloped in the love of God...a love that has never left us & never will...Others may reject us...we may even reject ourselves,.. but God accepts us just as we are...He may not like everything we do; so He will never stop trying to make us better...but God will never, ever reject us.

So the next time we experience a painful rejection, it could help us to know that our God understands what we are going through...He's been there...& to know that we are still loved by God,...accepted by God...important to God....That by itself may not be enough, because we will never stop needing people. ...But God's unfailing love is a solid rock we can stand on when other relationships let us down.

My friends, our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world & lived as one rejected by His own people...He sees the rejection we experience, & He answers it with compassion, acceptance & love...And He wants us - His followers - to do the same...to be people who accept one another as He has accepted us...to be people who respond with compassion, acceptance & love whenever we see someone or some group rejected unfairly...for reasons that have nothing to do with their worth in the eyes of God...their value as precious children of God... We have all felt the sting of rejection...We have all felt at least a little of what Jesus must have felt as He hung from His cross... By His dying & rising, He transformed that cross from a symbol of rejection into a sign of new & glorious life...May we embrace our crosses of rejection in the sure & certain hope that we too will share in the new & glorious life He promises to all who come to Him. AMEN.