

February 23, 2020: Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

The other day, as I was walking into my bathroom, I saw my cat Harry sitting on the toilet seat waiting for me. He then went to jump from the seat into the sink. But I noticed he hesitated as he wanted to make sure he could make the jump. His front paws were on the sink and his back paws were on the seat. He sort of rocked back and forth on his hind legs until he felt sure he could make the transition, and then he did. Harry and his sister Sally are getting older. In April they will be eighteen years old which is getting up there for cats (equivalent to 88 human years). And I have noticed the changes over the years of what they can no longer do. When Harry got here almost five years ago, he could easily jump five feet in the air. One time I came into the bedroom and saw Harry on top of the bureau, which is about five feet in height, and the only way he could have gotten there was by jumping from the floor. Now his ability to jump is getting more limited, but for his age he is still doing pretty well.

The changes that happen as we get older are inevitable. Our limitations obviously increase as we age and we cannot quite manage the things we did easily in the past. We can try to mitigate these changes, but in time we must adjust to our new norm. Harry cannot jump like he could in the past, but he finds other ways to get where he wants to go. But, it is interesting that what is true for our physical ability is *not* true for our spiritual.

This week we will enter the wonderful season of Lent—a time to assess our spiritual limitations and see how we can change and grow stronger in our faith and in our relationship with Christ. I think one of the biggest issues we have with Lent is that we have a misunderstanding of what the season is really about. People focus on what they will do and *not* on why they do them. And that usually creates a distorted sense of our Lenten practices.

One of the most important things we can do during Lent is our Lenten sacrifice, or “what we give up.” This has been so distorted that it is not unusual to hear people say something like, “I am not giving something up for Lent—I am going to do something positive instead.” The whole point of the Lenten sacrifice—what we give up—is to change our perspective on life and to help us have a life more centered in Christ. What is more positive than that?! We must also realize that it is not so much about giving up something, as it is about offering back to the Lord the good He has given us. We cannot offer back to the Lord something like, stopping smoking, not gossiping, and the like; we should not be doing these things anyway. They are not gifts given to us from God—they arise from sin. The point of sacrifice, as we see demonstrated by Christ on the Cross, is to offer back to God the good He has given us. Christ offered his very life. And our sacrifice should lead us to desire to do the same. The point of the sacrifice is *not* to make us miserable, but to lead us to give praise and thanksgiving to God for his great blessings in our life. It is about helping us to be open to God’s gracious benediction in our lives. It is about helping us to see life through the eyes of Christ, and to recognize that all the good in our life comes from God, and God alone. It should help us to grow in humility and a desire to empty ourselves of all that is not of Christ.

We are also called to grow in prayer during Lenten, and not with the idea that once Lent is over we are done praying. Rather, Lent helps us to focus on our need for prayer. We come to recognize that prayer is simply having a dialogue with the Lord, and to understand that we are not the authors of our conversation. God began this conversation the moment He created us. And from that point on He has been talking to us. The problem is that we don’t hear Him because we are not listening to Him. Lent is a time to stop and truly try to learn how to hear God in our lives. It is a time to make the prophet Samuel’s words our own, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” One powerful way to grow in prayer is through the devotion of Adoration—taking time simply to be with the Lord. When we enter into the prayer of Adoration, whether before the tabernacle or the Eucharist exposed in the monstrance, we know Jesus is right there with us. And it is a powerful way to pray. I usually spend somewhere between 1½ and 2 hours in Adoration each day. I usually begin my day with this prayer. And being with Jesus in this way makes a major difference in my day. I am not asking people to do this. If you have not prayed in Adoration before, try coming for only 10 minutes and just be with the Lord.

These practices and others we can do during Lent is about one thing: helping us to discover our limitations—the places where we are stunted spiritually and need to grow. It is about recognizing that I cannot change myself, but God’s grace can help me change from the person I am to being the person He created me to be. Unlike Harry, who cannot change the process of his physical decline, we can change our spiritual state with the help of God. And Lent is the perfect time to do just that.

May we use this Lent to grow in our desire to praise God. May we use this Lent as an opportunity to truly listen to the Lord. May we use this Lent to grow in faith, hope, and charity!

Wishing you all a fruitful Lent!

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian