

June 28, 2020: Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The other day I was sitting in the Rectory chapel praying when Harry came and jumped on my lap. He first stood on me and kneaded my stomach. When he finally got comfortable, he curled up, laid down and started purring profusely. He was getting patted and was clearly very happy with the situation. And then, all of sudden, he saw some birds fly by the window and immediately got off my lap and started paying attention to them. He was so distracted by the birds that he completely forgot about how happy and content he was just a moment ago. After he could no longer see the birds, Harry simply left the chapel, forgetting about why he was there in the first place. And, the worst part—he was clearly happier before he got distracted by the momentary amusement.

If we are honest with ourselves, what happened to Harry is something that happens to all of us far too often and far too easily, especially when it comes to our relationship with others *and* with God. Just as an example, how often do we watch people—when they are with others—pay more attention to their cell phones than the people around them? Or, see someone who is talking to one person but gets disconnected from that person when someone “better” enters the room? Or, how often are we in a situation when all we can do is think about what is coming next?

Our ability to remain focused can be a real issue. It is now said that for a person to really hear what is being said, he or she needs to hear it at least seven times in seven different ways. I can attest to this: many times when I have announced something at the end of Mass, people have come up to me and asked about what was just announced since they had not yet heard about it. The ability to focus on what is occurring right before us truly can be one of the greatest challenges we face as human beings. And with the advance of technology this seems to be getting even more difficult.

But the reality is that the ability, or better put, the desire to remain focused is ultimately about the choices we make. We do not have to be as easily distracted as we are. Learning to become more focused is really about learning to simply stay in the moment and allow that to be what is most important in your life. The truth is that when we cannot stay focused on the moment, our lives tend to swirl somewhat out of control. When our lives become about the next passing distraction, we have difficulty encountering a true sense of joy or contentment. We become more focused on anticipating what is going to happen next than what we are actually called to be engaged in at that moment.

And I think this is one of the reasons we can have such a difficult time hearing the voice of the Lord in our lives. The simple truth is that to recognize God’s presence and to hear his voice means one must pay attention to what is happening in the moment. Think of Moses’ first encounter with the Lord. He saw a burning bush and noticed it was unusual because it was burning but not on fire. And that caused him to go and check it out. Samuel, hearing the voice of the Lord several times, tried to determine what it meant and spoke those powerful words, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” Elijah, on the mountaintop, trying to hear the voice of the Lord, had to ignore the powerful wind, the earthquake, and so forth, in order to recognize the voice of the Lord in the small tiny whisper. Andrew, when he decided to follow Jesus, had to pay attention to what John the Baptist was telling him. Mary, who chose to stop all she was doing when Jesus came to supper, sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to Him while her sister Martha complained. The blind man, who sat on the side of the road, cried out to Jesus while others tried to get him to quiet down; he yelled all the louder, staying focused on Christ.

There is common element to all of these experiences. Each and every one of them simply stayed in the moment. They opened up to all that was happening around them. And, by not allowing the distractions to get in the way of what really mattered, they had a profound encounter the Lord. Moses could have ignored the extraordinary event, but instead, he investigated what it might mean and found his vocation. Samuel was confused by his encounter with the Lord, but through perseverance he came to begin his conversation with God. Elijah knew God was trying to speak to him, and so when he simply ignored the noise, he discovered the true voice of God in his midst. The blind man could simply have listened to the crowd and never been healed, but, in a sense, through his faith he saw what they could not. He remained focused on the only One who could heal him. Mary could have simply followed the lead of Martha; instead, she recognized what true hospitality was about and she remained

focused on Christ. Andrew wanted to find the Messiah and, by responding to John's prompting, he found Jesus—the One he was looking for.

When we stay focused on how God is acting in our life, we can discover so much more about ourselves and what our lives should be about. It is easy to get distracted by what is going on around us—to be distracted by the momentary fancy. But our distractions generally lead to nothing of value.

Let us strive to ignore the distractions and seek to stay focused on what truly matters—Jesus in our lives.

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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

Fr. Brian