

January 31, 2021: Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

My cat Sally likes to drink out of the faucet in the bathtub and can be quite insistent about it. Today, she got into the tub and started crying—rather loudly—for me to come and turn on the water. I went in to comply with her demand and turned on the water, but I did not realize that I was turning on the shower. Let's just say she was not particularly happy with my mistake. Of course, I immediately switched it to faucet and then she began to drink. When Sally was done drinking, she came over to me and jumped into my lap. It was then that I realized how wet she was. I began drying her off and she started purring—she liked the attention. And, of course, this was all happening while I was in a Zoom meeting. Whenever I am in a meeting, Sally has a tendency of deciding that she needs to join me. I must admit that it does *not* bother me a bit, but I often wonder what the others might be thinking.

Sally definitely knows what she wants and is not shy about communicating it. In fact, she can get rather loud when it suits her. In the last few weeks, since Harry's death, this has become more apparent. She clearly misses her brother which is understandable considering they spent over eighteen years together. She is having a difficult time right now making this transition. For me, one of the good things is that she has become more clingy. She sleeps on me more and looks for me more than in the past. She has always been an affectionate cat, but she is even more so now.

The problem, of course, lies in the fact that I cannot explain to her what has happened. She knows something is different. She knows Harry is not around but she cannot understand why. Her world has been turned upside down. It is clear that she would prefer things to be as they were. And well, as we know, that is not possible.

How often we all run into this kind of situation in our lives. Things happen and we do not understand why. We want answers, and yet we cannot get them. We want things to return to the way they were, but no one can tell us how to make that happen. We need to figure out how to adjust to the new reality, but that does not seem possible. We are in too much pain. We are too overwhelmed. We are too broken from what has happened in our life. We find ourselves stuck and disoriented by the new situation we are in.

What is the answer? How do we discern the way forward? How do we take the first step? These questions can seem daunting, and it almost feels unimaginable that there is a real solution to the upheavals in our lives. And so, it is not unusual for people to turn to God, either for the answers *or* to blame Him.

However, the healthier Christian response would be very different. Saint Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement." (2 Cor. 1:3-7)

We then must unite ourselves with Christ in our suffering, and through it, recognize that God is leading us to a moment of transforming love. We must realize that God does not cause our suffering, but He will make use of it to draw us ever closer to Him. Our suffering helps us to recognize the fragility of this life, that this life is not the final tale and that we are dependent on God for all things. It can bring forth from us a true sense of humility that can lead us to die to ourselves and entrust ourselves wholly and completely to the mercy of God. It can help us look beyond our immediate situation and recognize that we are made for eternal union with God—the ultimate goal and reality of every human life. When Christ becomes our focus in our suffering, we can say with Him, "Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit." As we seek to hand everything over to God, we become more open to recognize and experience his perfect love for us. This is the love that Christ expressed through his passion and death, and the love the Father expressed through the resurrection. God's love for us becomes the focus of our suffering, and when we open ourselves to this love, suffering takes on the meaning that will lead us to salvation. It will help us to die to ourselves and to know God's unconditional and unmerited love for us.

Obviously I cannot teach this to Sally, but for humans the answer is really always the same: our faith in Christ will lead us to where we need to go.

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 purple ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Brian', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Brian