

AUGUST 22, 2021: 21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



Growing up in my home was always an interesting endeavor, for the simple reason that you never really knew who could end up living there. My Mom believed in what could be called a very open home that welcomed anyone who needed a place to live. My sister had a friend who got pregnant as a teenager and whose parents threw her out, and so my parents welcomed her into our home. And when her son was born, he simply became one more member of our growing community. Later on, there was a mother who became so overwhelmed, with raising her children on her own, that she called my mom and one of their mutual friends and asked them to take her children. They found homes for all the children

and even one of them came to live with us. That was the beginning of our taking in, over time, some 38 foster children. When my uncle Tony ended up needing a place to live, my mom opened our home to him and he moved in until he got back on his feet. Through the years there were many others and other stories of how people came to live with us for a time. My mom very much believed in being there for those in need. I asked her once why she did this and her response was simple: "God has shown me so much love that I feel I need to share it with others." She also was very clear about why this all could work—it was my dad. It was very simple: you did not argue with my dad when he told you to do something. My Mom could create as much chaos as she wanted because my dad could keep it all under control.

Growing up in our home taught me a lot, but it specifically taught me how to live in a community. It also taught me the importance of a community and that having a community is truly necessary. We are not created to be solitary beings; we are created in the image and likeness of God who, in the unity of the Trinity, is a communion of humility, sacrifice, and self-giving. It is a community centered in the other and that is how my Mom sought to run our home. And that is exactly why Christ created his Church.

The growth of the Christian faith would not be possible without a community. The growth of our faith is centered directly in our very nature. We need the Church because we need a community to help us discover and live out what it means to be truly human. We cannot do this on our own. Christ knew and understood what would be necessary to continue his mission of salvation. Therefore, He created the Church with that one purpose in mind—to lead the world to Him in order for the world to embrace the salvation that He alone won for them. Salvation is not possible apart from Christ.

The Church is not simply an institution of buildings, rules, and regulations. Rather, it is a society that has rules and regulations as any community would in order to survive. If you think about it, it is impossible to have *any* relationship without rules and regulations. And the Church's rules are centered on one thing—helping us grow in right relationship with Jesus. And Jesus is the *only* one to choose how we will grow in that relationship. We have no say in how we should relate to Christ; again, that is all in Jesus' hands. Our role in our relationship with Christ is discovered in humble obedience to his will and his way. Jesus wanted to form a community that would lead us to Him and help us grow in that relationship; He knew how necessary his Church would be.

He also knew that there would be a need for leadership. A society cannot function without there being a person(s) who can lead us into knowing and understanding the truth. As such, Jesus planned for this through the three-fold ministry of holy orders. The purpose of those who are called to be in holy orders is to serve the people of God and lead them to Jesus who will lead them to salvation. Those in holy orders are not "in charge" to rule over people, but rather, to keep order in what can be a chaotic situation. The truth and reality is that our Church is very much like the home I grew up in: everyone is welcome. But there still needs to be some order in this community or it would be very easy to lose sight of who is *ultimately* in charge—Jesus!

What we call "the hierarchy" is somewhat of a misnomer. When we hear that word in relation to the Church, we usually think of those in holy orders—the religious. But the word hierarchy comes from the Greek word *hieros* which means priest. All the baptized belong to the royal priesthood of the baptized and, therefore, all share at some level in the hierarchy. In reality, the hierarchy is about sharing in the one true priesthood which is the priesthood of Jesus. And it is

about allowing that priesthood to be seen in the world. Every baptized person has a responsibility to make that happen, but each of us is called to do it differently. To help make this happen, we need to make use of the sacraments which give us the grace necessary to understand what Christ is asking us to do.

The Church has a distinct role in helping us understand exactly how we are to proclaim the mission of Christ in the world. Through the Holy Spirit, she is invested with: the power of the sacraments; rightly proclaiming the word; properly interpreting the word and will of God concerning faith and morals; and having the insight to properly govern the society Christ created. All of this enables each one of us to be open to our gifts and talents that we can use to further Christ's mission. This community of faith—the Church—will help us unfold and live out Christ's mission in a very particular way.

We will continue this discussion next week.

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".

Fr. Brian