

NOVEMBER 13, 2022: 33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



There is an old fable called *The Scorpion and The Frog*. A scorpion wants to cross a river but cannot swim, and so it asks a frog to carry it across. The frog hesitates, afraid that the scorpion might sting it, but the scorpion promises not to, pointing out that it would drown if it killed the frog in the middle of the river. The frog considers this argument sensible and agrees to transport the scorpion. Midway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog anyway, dooming them both. The dying frog asks the scorpion why it stung him despite knowing the consequence. The scorpion replies: "I am sorry, but I couldn't resist the urge. It's in my nature."

This fable speaks to something that many people believe to be true—that how we choose to act really is unchangeable. How often people will use the adage: you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. They believe that once a person's personality, character, nature—or whatever you want to call it—is set, they are who they are. As Christians that is not something we should accept as being true: anyone can change if they are open to the possibility of change.

However, our ability to change is not predicated on our simply deciding to change and then working on ourself. Each and every one of us is broken in unique ways. And it all rises from the power of sin and the influence of the world calling us away from hearing God in our lives. God has created us as a particular person with distinctive gifts and talents. Moreover, our gifts and our special ways enable us to live out our faith and be in proper relationship with God. We are all created in God's likeness and image, but God is infinite and we are finite. No one person, except for Jesus of course, can express the full reality of God. But each of us, in the life God called us to live, will express some aspect of God. This is why each person is especially important.

We need to recognize that the problem most of us run into is that we want to determine the person we think we should be. In other words, we try to create ourselves in an image of our own making, which in reality is a form of idolatry. We want to shape our life and the world around us according to our idol. We want the world to work as we believe it should work. The more we become intent on following this pattern, the more we become ingrained in how we live out our lives, and the more it begins to shape our relationship with God, others, and creation. The more this happens, the further away we will move from discovering our true identity. But... the more we *lose* this sense of self-determination, the more we will discover the person God created us to be.

I pray daily *not* to be the person *I* have created but, rather, the person *God* created me to be. It is a daily reminder to me that I need to let go of all the ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that arise from my idols. How does this change occur? How is it possible to let go of what seems to be our 'set ways'? GRACE!!! As the angel Gabriel tells Mary—all things are possible with God. We simply need to look to Saint Paul. He was the Church's greatest persecutor at its beginning. He worked hard to destroy what God was trying to create. And in a moment of immense clarity, he realized that he was on the wrong path. That clarity came from God acting in his life. It was the grace of God that led him to change from the Church's greatest persecutor to the Church's greatest missionary. He went from seeking the death of Christians to willingly dying for the faith. Paul is the surest sign that change is possible for anyone who is willing to cooperate with the grace of God.

We may not be able to teach an old dog new tricks, but God can. The person we created may be willing to act as the scorpion did and sting the one trying to help them. Like the scorpion, we might believe 'I am who I am and that is the best I can do.' But the truth is that *God* can and will help us discover the deeper truth of who we *really* are.

By being open to God's grace, we can come to discover the person we were meant to be—the person we have rejected. We will discover that we have far more gifts and talents than we ever realized. The only thing preventing any of this from happening is ourselves. It is not that we cannot change; it is simply our refusal to see how that change is possible. And, honestly, it is usually fear that stops us from being open to new

possibilities. It is fear that prevents us from discovering the truth of who we really are. It is fear that holds us in place and stops us from discerning all of the gifts and talents that God has given us.

May we use the gifts that God has given us to begin to discover the truth of who we are: prayer, scripture, the sacraments (particularly confession) and the Church. May we come to decide that: I no longer want to be the person I have created, but to truly become the person God has created me to be.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

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

Fr. Brian