MARCH 5, 2023: 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

One of the things I remember growing up was a daily ritual my parents had. Both of my parents were teachers; my dad taught in Groton and my mom taught in Marlboro. My dad generally got home after my mom, and when he came into the house, my parents would sit and talk with each other about their day. They had a rule that for at least the first half-hour they would not talk about their children. It was always about how their day went. They would talk about the problems they encountered or the good experiences they had, and so forth. This time of communicating was an important part of how they worked on deepening their relationship.

By this simple activity my parents really demonstrated to all of us the importance of good communication in any relationship. It was not enough to assume things were going well or that you knew what the other was thinking. You had to give real time each day that focused on the relationship in order for that relationship to truly grow and mature.

What was true of my parent's relationship is, of course, true of every relationship and, most importantly, true of our relationship with God. What can happen too easily in relationships is that complacency can set in. That happens when we stop doing the work necessary for the relationship to grow and deepen, and then it begins to wither and die. It is much like I tell my couples as I prepare them for marriage. Many couples, when they begin to have children, stop being a couple and simply become parents. They really stop working on their relationship and focus solely on the lives of their children. When that happens, it is not a matter of *if* the relationship will end, but a matter of when. There is no true relationship when there is no meaningful communication.

If we want a real relationship with God, we must put some effort into it. The most important part of this relationship is our willingness to communicate with God. And that means we must be willing to pray, for the simple reason that praying is how we communicate with God. If we choose *not* to pray, we are simply stating that we do not want a relationship with God. We have decided that there are more important things in our life than God. We can come up with lots of excuses for why God will be okay with this. God has to understand that we are too busy to take time for Him. Essentially, we are telling Him that He is not a priority in our life.

To recognize why our choices, struggles, heartaches, distress, and the like are so difficult, we must understand that it is rooted in our lack of a relationship with God. The more we choose *not* to pray, the more we distance ourselves from God and make our life harder than it needs to be. God does not promise that Christians will never encounter pain and heartache in their lives. Unfortunately, that is part of the human condition. Rather, He promises that He will be with us in our struggles. He promises never to forsaken or abandon us. God will be our source of strength—our rock—as we experience evil and suffering in the world. But, in order for that to happen we must do our part and actually make time for God in our life.

So often the idea of prayer seems something arduous to us when it is really rather simple. Prayer is nothing more than God communicating with human beings. And that is the order of prayer: it does not begin with *us*. It begins with *God* choosing to humble Himself—to condescend to give his time and presence to us. In prayer God makes a positive, conscience effort to open Himself to us. All He asks is that we respond in kind. We must remember that prayer never begins with us. Our very desire to pray is God's gift to us. It comes about by the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The other issue I often hear from people is that God never really answers their prayers. That problem actually arises from two issues. Either they have not learned to have ears that hear, or God simply has said no and that is not an answer acceptable to them. God always responds; we just need to learn how to listen. And the only way to do this is to take time each day for prayer.

No one is too busy to pray. We simply choose not to make it **the priority** in our lives that it should be. The Lord gives us 1440 minutes every day. Technically, from whatever God gives us, we should give the first ten percent back to Him. That would be a little over two hours a day in prayer. But I would ask that you try something simpler: one percent of your day—15 minutes. I know everyone can manage 15 minutes a day.

Let us use this Lent to begin carving out space in our day to simply talk with God. There are lots of ways to do it. But, no matter how you do it, it should essentially be a means of having a conversation with God, for that is all that prayer really is. When we pray, we are seeking to have and grow in a real relationship with God. May we be willing to make the time and put in the effort to make God the priority in our lives that He should be, and thereby grow in our relationship with Him.

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,

Fr. Brian