

JANUARY 14, 2024: 2ND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME



When I was growing up, the fluid in my ear that helps control balance was off. As such, I had really bad balance and my depth perception was off. At times I would be just walking and simply fall down. It was part of the reason that I was not very good at playing sports. Over time I did learn how to compensate for it. I began to sense when I might fall and adjusted so it would not happen. As I got older, I was able to overcome that lack of balance. One of the things I wanted to learn to do was ski, but with my poor balance that was not realistic. I decided to try it anyway. The first time I went skiing I fell in love with it, even though I fell a lot. But, in time and with determination

and focus, I begin to get good at skiing. I developed a technique and worked really hard at it. It was about focusing on the fundamentals of proper turning, positioning my body, and understanding what I needed to do on a particular run: how steep was it, what were the snow conditions, how wide was the trail, and so forth.

It is easy to let your limitations determine what you can and cannot do. It is easy to allow that sense of being out of balance to hold you back. But, ultimately, life will be what you decide to make of it. Will you let your limitations determine what you will try to do? Or, will you be willing to push beyond and see what you can accomplish without preset conditions? The reality is that with my balance issues, I should never have bothered with skiing. But, where is the fun of simply saying 'no, it cannot be done'? I would rather have failed trying than not to have tried at all.

Embracing a truly Christian life can be a daunting task. It is so easy to live on the surface of our faith and believe that is enough. We can treat our faith like a coat that we take on and off as we please. The reality is that Christian life calls for a true commitment to Christ and must be lived every moment of our lives; every choice we make must be centered in Christ. I believe the biggest issue with Christianity is that most people are actually afraid of trying to live it. It calls for a radical choice and that radical choice can be very scary. What a Christian may see as being nice and good may not reflect how society would define those terms. Christian life is about letting go. It is a life of humility, obedience, self-emptying, dying to self, and unconditional love. It is a life of true sacrifice. Ultimately, it is a life of vulnerability, and I believe that call to vulnerability is what prevents most people from truly embracing our faith. When we allow ourselves to be truly vulnerable, our lives can really feel off balance.

We hear so often about the problems with Christians and Christianity. People will talk about the hypocrisy that seems to be rampant in the various denominations. They will point to the various scandals that have occurred throughout the history of our faith. They will point to the teachings of Christ and how often people do not uphold them. The deeper truth is *not* that the teachings of Christ have failed; rather, it is that people have simply chosen not to live the faith. And, again, it comes down to what our faith is really calling us to do.

Our faith is not a set of propositions that we simply need to check off. It is not about a set of rules that we abide by and then go on our merry way. True Christian faith is about relationship, first and foremost; everything else then comes off that. God is not calling us to simply live the ten commandments, the beatitudes, the golden rule. He is calling us to a far deeper commitment. He calls us to discover both who we have become and who He has created us to be. Those two realities do not usually match up. It calls for us to trust in God and allow Him to become a mirror to our lives, so that He can help us see how far we are from being the person He created us to be. It is a call to vulnerability. Most of us do not want to be honest with ourselves: we would choose being comfortable over being challenged. Most of us want to live our lives with a sense of balance, but we are called, like Peter, to come out of the boat and walk on water.

The sacraments are a reminder of our need for God. Baptism makes it possible for us live in true relationship with God, others, creation, and self. Without baptism this is not possible: God must first heal, through baptism, what was broken by Original Sin. Confirmation strengthens us to embrace and complete our baptismal vows, to become that servant of faith who lives out the model of Christ. "I have come not to be served but to serve." It should deepen our commitment to worship God as God calls us to worship Him. It calls us to embrace the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to allow the fruits of the Spirit to be witnessed in our relationship with others. It helps us to become stewards, and not owners, of creation. And, finally, it strengthens us to take true responsibility to embrace our faith, to grow in a deeper sense of our true identity—that we are made in the image and likeness of God. The Eucharist is a testament to God's deep and abiding love for us, and in some ways it is the scariest of all the

sacraments. If we truly believe what Christ taught us about this wondrous gift, our lives would have to change. He was clear that what He was giving us in the Eucharist was the gift of himself—his true body and blood. The Eucharist is food for the journey that Christ is calling us to, which again is not usually the one we want to take. It is far easier to dismiss the teachings of the Church than to embrace the faith in its fullness. It is far easier to dismiss the encounter we have with Christ in the Eucharist. The level of love that God exhibits in the Eucharist is scary. God is making himself vulnerable in order to show us the way. And that way leads to the Sacrament of Penance. Failure in Christian life is *not* that we sin: it is the refusal to recognize the sin and become truly contrite. Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance is not about berating ourselves for our brokenness. It is about being vulnerable with God and acknowledging our need for his mercy and forgiveness. It is reaching out to Jesus as we begin to drown and allowing Him to lift us up. It is trusting in God's unconditional love for us.

The sacraments are God's gifts to us to help us in letting go of our fears. They help us to live life slightly out of balance. They help us when we fall, to get back up and continue our journey with the Lord. It is the only way to discover who we really are. It is about coming into true relationship with God. It is about being willing to be challenged and forced to change. The only true failure is *not* that we have tried and failed, but that we have never tried at all. May we, as a community, become truly honest with ourselves. May we seek God to become the mirror of our lives. May we be willing to live our life a little off balance and seek to become truly vulnerable with God. May we begin to truly live our faith.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call me at (978) 254-0560. If you prefer to email, please visit.....

<https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.

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