

SCREEN: Happy Father's Day

Again, Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there!

It's been over two years since my dad passed away, and I'm still getting regular reminders about his life.

Just last week I got a phone call from the secretary at my former parish of St. Benedict The Moor Church in Washington, DC. It had been a few years since we'd spoken and at one point she asked, *'how's your mom and dad?'*

I told her mom was doing good but dad passed away in 2018.

She said, *'Fr. Mike, parishioners still ask about your father.'*

He was so friendly and funny!'

And I thought, *yep, that was dad.*

He was open and approachable and could strike up a conversation with anybody...even strangers...which sometimes drove us kids crazy.

When it came to other people, my dad's philosophy was fairly simple:

- give people the benefit of the doubt
- assume the best until someone gives you reason not to *and*
- be willing to forgive; give people second chances.

And I think that's a great philosophy for all of us to have, especially if we want to be good disciples of Jesus.

SCREEN: Let's Make A Deal main screen

Today is week two of our message series titled, *Let's Make A Deal.*

As I said last week when we began this series, the title may come from an old TV game show, but the message is a timely one:

When God the Father sent his Son Jesus as the messiah, he offered humanity the greatest deal of all time.

God said:

- believe in my Son Jesus,
- accept my unconditional love for you and

- love others unconditionally every day.

God is a loving Father, a loving dad.

His greatest desire is for all his children to stay close to him always.

And even more than my own dad, God never tires of giving second chances.

Whenever we sin or turn away, God seeks us out and welcomes us back with open arms.

This is the meaning of the verse from St. John which we first heard two weeks:

**SCREEN: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life. -John 3:16**

In today's Gospel Jesus was teaching his followers about their heavenly Father.

Now, to give some context to the words we heard,

Jesus said them near the start of his ministry.

He called the Twelve Apostles and then commissioned them to go and announce that the Kingdom of God is here.

Before they set out, Jesus gave them lots of instructions and he told them their mission would not be easy.

He even said to the Apostles, *"I'm sending you like sheep among wolves."*

Gulp! That's not a comforting image if you're the sheep.

It must have scared the heck out of them,

so Jesus reassured them when he said this:

SCREEN: Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?

Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge.

Even all the hairs of your head are counted.

So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. -Mt 10: 29-31

This was Jesus's way of saying to them:

no matter what happens,

no matter what challenges or suffering you face,

God is with you, God is in control, and God has a plan.

Strengthened by this message the Apostles could

set out on their mission and tell others about the Father's love

and the salvation offered to them through his Son.

And it's that salvation that you and I need to be reminded of today.

SCREEN: salvation

But, let me stop for a minute to talk about this word 'salvation'.

It's a term that preachers use all the time,

but I'm not sure everyone knows what we mean by it.

Salvation simply means 'being saved'.

But saved from what?

From sin and death.

But no one likes admitting the 'sin' part.

'I'm a sinner' is not a phrase the average person says out loud.

We're more likely to point and call others sinners.

That's because we are so certain that others' sins are way worse than ours.

I've even had Catholics say to me,

"Father, I may have cheated, I may have lied or gossiped....

but I'm not as bad as...my brother/my sister, that politician,

or those people in the news."

But until each of us admit that we personally are sinners,

there is no room for God to enter in and save us.

SCREEN: hand of Jesus saving the drowning man

So, here's an image that might help you understand salvation.

Picture yourself floating in the ocean in the midst of a terrible storm.

You're all alone, clinging to a raft trying desperately not to drown.

Then out of nowhere, Jesus appears reaches out his hand and shouts,

"grab hold, I've come to save you!"

Salvation is that moment when you let go, take hold of his hand,

and allow him to draw you out of the waves and carry you to safety.

So that's the deal Christ offers:

admit you are a sinner so Christ can save you.

Then your purpose in life becomes clear.

Like the Apostles in today's Gospel who were sent by Jesus,

once you've been rescued, you need to help save others.

Your faith is a gift to save others from drowning.

To be a follower of Christ right now is a huge challenge.

To say that 2020 has been a difficult year would be an understatement.

First the pandemic, then economic devastation, and now deep unrest caused by racial injustice...

and this is only June!

It's not the first time I've said this but, our world is broken.

This is not what God wants for the world he created or for the children he loves.

The hatred and divisions, the indifference and apathy are all contrary to the will of God.

The temptation many churchgoers are facing right now is to just keep their heads down and ignore what is going on.

I think they're afraid that if they act as Jesus did:

- if they give people the benefit of the doubt
- assume the best about others and
- are willing to forgive,

then they'll end up like the sheep who are devoured by wolves.

But now is the time for all true disciples to take a stand and stick their neck out.

SCREEN: God is with me

God is in control

God has a plan

If you and I are going to be God's healing presence in the world, we need reminding of what Jesus said to the Apostles:

God is with us, God is in control, and God has a plan.

We need to tell ourselves this everyday...and keep reciting it:

God is with me, God is in control, and God has a plan.

This can help us whenever times get tough or we feel like we're drowning in hopelessness or despair.

And it will strengthen us for the mission God is asking us to do.

God is with me, God is in control, and God has a plan.

And just as I said on the Feast of the Ascension,
God's plan for leading others to salvation today is *US!*
You and I are God's plan.

When Jesus commissioned the Apostles and sent them out
he was making it clear that the gift of faith they'd been given
must be shared with others.

It wasn't a private possession to be kept to themselves.

The same is true when it comes to our faith:
we must live and share our faith for all to see.

Faith demands a response.

It only truly comes alive when you live and share it.

And when you do share your faith boldly and courageously,
you can help save countless others.

And it is okay to be afraid.

SCREEN: do not be afraid...even all the hairs of you head are counted

Remember Jesus's words:

Do not be afraid...even all the hairs of your head are counted.

I love that image: *even all the hairs of your head are counted by God.*

It's saying God created you - God knows every fiber of your being.

It's an intimate, personal knowledge.

It's saying, God knows you better than you know yourself.

It's also saying that God knows your potential
and sees your possibility for greatness.

But don't allow your fear to paralyze you or keep you from
carrying out our mission.

Two weeks ago I challenged you to help bring healing by
starting a conversation with others about what is happening right now.

SCREEN: blank red background

This past week, I invited a group of parishioners to meet with our staff
to help plan our church's response.

And very soon we will have more information to share with you

on how you can get involved.

I don't know where this will go, but I know it's a start.

And we're start from the attitude I've just preached about:

we are children of God which makes us all brothers and sisters.

And we are all sinners in need of Christ's saving love.

With these beliefs as our foundation,

real dialogue and change become possible.

Without them, we remain divided and entrenched with no clear way forward.

I started off talking about the lessons I learned from my dad

about how to treat others.

It's how I strive to live everyday.

Today and this week, may others see the salvation of the Lord

in all we say and do. Amen. +