

## Fr Ryan Homily 5-14-23 – Mother's Day

Read: Acts of the Apostles 8:5-8, 14-17; Psalm 66; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21

Well happy Mother's Day to everyone. I hope that it's a good day for you with your family or whoever you might be spending the day with as we celebrate our moms and the great gift of motherhood. So in the homily today I'd like to do three things, answer three questions really. One is what's happening in the first reading, two do things like that still happen today, and then three what might God be saying to us gathered here as we reflect on it especially in light of it being Mother's Day today. So first one, the first reading is from Acts Chapter 8. Pentecost happened in Acts Chapter 2 so this is only a few weeks, maybe a few days after Pentecost and Saul has showed up in Jerusalem, Stephen the church's first martyr has been killed, and many Christians are now fleeing from Jerusalem scared for their lives. Only the original apostles are left in the city. And Philip, who was a fellow deacon with Stephen who has now seen him be killed, he heads to Samaria. And Philip starts doing two things. He starts testifying. He's talking all about what Jesus has done in His life and he starts doing these dramatic signs and wonders. Demons came out of people. Crippled people are cured which leads to people being won over to the gospel and accepting it. And so because of the persecutions in Jerusalem and the Christians fleeing, the church actually continues to grow at a very rapid pace and through people like Philip. That's what is taking place in the first reading. And so now we can ask that second question, do things like that still happen today? Or another way to say it is are miracles real? Do they still happen? Should we still expect them from God when we ask for them? Now if we think back, what did Jesus tell us at the end of the gospel last Sunday? He said to us the person who believes in Him will do the same works He did and greater works than these. They'll do greater works than these so should we expect these extraordinary things? I mean I guess only if we don't want to imply Jesus is a liar when He says that. That when we petition God in Jesus' name, Jesus Himself said we will do greater things than He did. Now hearing that should give us pause. Like that should take us back a little bit. That's a big deal. Ah I heard the testimony of this man through something called Alpha, which is this program for evangelization that was popular in the church a few years back and I think his testimony rivals anything in Samaria the day that Philip showed up there. So his name is Shane Taylor and Shane is probably in his mid to late 30's. He's a big dude, maybe 6'4",

250 pounds, just muscles on muscles, big shoulders. And Shane is from England and at one time he said he was considered to be one of Britain's most dangerous criminals. Said he grew up with the wrong kind of people and from a young age he learned how to pinch cars and burgle houses, that's how he said it being from England, but he would just steal anything he could get his hands on. He and a group of guys kidnapped a person, he had two attempted murders. He said he learned how to be hard and how to be respected from his uncle who he said was like a God to him. He said he loved to just walk down the street with his uncle and watch people's reactions to them. He would stab people who looked at him the wrong way, he sold drugs, and finally Shane said he was arrested for all of it. He was sent to prison. But he had such hatred for authority, for the system, that he stabbed two prison guards, which led to Shane being sent to a maximum-security prison. And he said from there he just waged war on everyone. And he found himself in solitary confinement. They fed him through a hatch in the door so that no one would ever have to touch him. Shane was allowed to come out of his cell once a day for one hour and when he did he was surrounded by guards in riot gear. And this went on for 7 years. Assaulting guards and inmates at every opportunity he got. Eventually Shane met a prison chaplain named Robert, who is a born again Christian, and he would tell Shane Jesus loves you. He wants to be your friend and Shane thinks the guy is an absolute crackpot. Like tells him to get lost, takes his pamphlets and throws them in the garbage. Well things continue to spiral downward. Shane gets put under investigation for subversive behavior because he's trying to incite the other inmates as well. And that's when Shane says all of a sudden he had this vision in his head of this chaplain Robert who had visited him, and he was just standing in front of him. It was driving Shane nuts; he couldn't get it out of his mind. So he decides to write Robert a letter. What is going on, I don't understand this. And Robert writes back, and he says Jesus is trying to get to you. Jesus is trying to touch your heart. Go to Him, let Him. And Shane is thinking like this guy is really nuts cause this is all crazy talk to him. But eventually he hears about one of the prison's ministry sessions. He decides to go to it. Like he goes, it's almost over, he's been very argumentative, contradicting everything the chaplain is trying to say. And the session ends, and someone says to Shane well why don't you come back next time, we're gonna have chocolate biscuits, chocolate cookies. So he decides to go back not for anything else but for those chocolate cookies. So Shane goes, not interested in God in the least, and

when it was over the pastor walks up to him and said I've never done this in these twenty years I've been doing this, but God is telling me to tell you to come back by yourself this afternoon. And so Shane went. And they sit down, the pastor starts reading from the Bible, praying for a bit. He's saying Jesus loves you Shane. He can forgive you. And then he said I think you're supposed to pray. Shane said what do I pray? And he said just talk to God, just talk to Him from your heart. And Shane is quiet for a moment, he's thinking, and finally he says God I hate who I am. I hate who I have become. Jesus come into my life. And he said he kept praying and as he did Shane said he started to feel something in his stomach, and it started to rise up through his body until he just started sobbing. Like bawling like a baby. He said he hadn't cried since he was a kid. The change in him that moment was so complete, so transformative that he started volunteering for the chaplaincy program at the prison. He went from being one of the youngest, most dangerous prisoners to being paroled within a year. The prison guards and inmates who were his enemies became his friends overnight. And Shane now spends his life, you guessed it, doing prison ministry. He goes to the prisons where he was once incarcerated at telling people there about the difference Jesus has made in his life. And when you watch Shane telling his story, and you can see it for yourself on YouTube, you can watch him tell his own story, it's like your looking at a child. You would never have dreamt he could've done the things that he did. He looked like an innocent child. This man had been dead. He'd been filled with hate and Jesus truly really brought him back to life. Shane is now married; he has four kids – maybe he has more now that's the last I heard. And so what might God be trying to tell us through Shane's story? Especially as we listen to it on Mother's Day. Well here's what I think He's saying especially to a mothers heart. I think God is simply saying don't give up on me. Like don't you dare give up on me. That I can do something just a dramatic in the life of your son or daughter. Cause moms you love your kids no matter what. But I know because you share with me sometimes you just shake your head, or you cry. You hurt deeply when you see the choices your kids can make, and you can't do anything about it. They leave the church. They live in a way that you don't agree with, whatever that might be, and God is saying just don't give up on Me cause you see what I did in Shane's life? Who I'm sure had a mother as well who was distraught over all of that stuff. Maybe praying for him fervently and God worked. And God can work in your family in just as powerful a way. C S Lewis used to say God is not safe. God is not tame. God

cannot be domesticated. Like God is good, to be sure, but He is not safe. He is powerful. He can find the lost. He can bring the dead to life in your family as well. And so we need to expect God to do those things. Don't give up on Him. Most people are not crippled physically, some are. A lot of people are crippled in their hearts, filled with despair, fear, this deep sadness, or discouragement. They might be paralyzed by hatred or sin. And just as Jesus did in the gospels, just as he did through the hands of Philip, just as he did in the heart of Shane. That same Jesus is still here alive and well. He's present in the acts. He does things and He can do just as if not more powerful things in your family, in the lives of your sons and daughters. Jesus wants to enter our hearts. He wants to change our lives and He's just looking for – He's waiting for the right opportunity to be let in. So moms keep praying, keep loving, it'll happen. Let's pray for that this morning. To ask God to be generous. Let's ask for God to do for us what He did in Samaria in Philip's time, what Jesus did in Shane's heart. Let's resolve to never give up on God who never gives up on any of us. Any of His children no matter how lost or broken. He is good and He is powerful, and He can bring any son or daughter back to life. So have confidence. Don't give up! Keep praying, keep loving, He is with you and happy Mother's Day.

Amen