

From the Deacon's Desk

Scripture Today:

I've always said that if we read scripture and don't feel uncomfortable or not challenged, then we're probably not reading or hearing it correctly. Sacred scripture is meant to comfort and give us hope, but scripture is also meant to challenge us to think and act differently.

Today's readings, especially the first one from Sarah should make us a little uncomfortable: "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?"

There is a difference between anger and hatred. Anger is a human emotion and like all human emotions, anger in and of itself is not good or bad; what makes it bad is what we do with it. Anger in many ways can be justified. There are many things in life we should get angry about, but if anger becomes a permanent disposition of mind and heart; if it becomes resentment and hatred, the bible teaches it is abhorrent.

The world we live in today seems to be filled with hatred, vengeance, violence, and basic restlessness. Maybe it's always been that way, but with immediate news coverage, we see it everywhere constantly. We see it on the news. We see it reflected in political speeches. We see it in movies and video games, and on the freeway.

Do you remember in early summer hearing about the college girl who was shot in the face and killed for cutting someone off on the freeway? How about the hatred and vengeance seen in recent months in Charlottesville? Is it even possible to go one day without experiencing some form of hatred, vengeance, and resentment in one way or another, either on the news, or in a movie, or in the day to day experiences around us?

Now contrast the hatred and violence of the world with the heroic efforts of people in Texas, or Florida, or a million other places in the world each day. Moments of crisis seem to bring out the best in human beings, but how do we hold these two extremes in balance? I'm not sure, but I think we become what we focus on the most, and we turn into what we hold tightly in our hearts.

We can't live a positive life with a negative mind. Negative experiences infiltrate our minds and hearts and hold us in a form of self-created prison. Jesus knew that forgiveness frees us, and that if we do not transform our own individual pain, we simply transmit it onto someone else.

There is so much pain and suffering in the world, and I've often said, that as beautiful and wonderful as this world is, God comes to us most perfectly and most powerfully through painful and tragic moments in life. If you look at the Bible as a whole, most of the Bible accounts are about God coming into the lives of people during moments of darkness, struggle, and pain, and providing them opportunities for healing and new life. Maybe Leonard Cohen said it best in his famous line: "There is a crack in everything and that is how the light gets in."

The scripture readings today couldn't be clearer; transcend your pain and do not let your emotions of anger turn into occasions of violence and vengeance. Forgive, or God will not forgive you.

We hear as much in the Bible about forgiveness as we do about love. How do we practice that though? I have a few suggestions borrowed from my own life on why we need to forgive.

- Let's be honest, we sometimes mess up a lot, with both my brothers and sisters, and with God. So maybe if I learn to transform my pain and forgive, God will forgive me.
- Because God needs us to be his agents of forgiveness for others in the world. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser has a wonderful story in his book *The Holy Longing* called "Touching the Hem of Jesus' Garment," which means that others experience God's forgiveness through our acts of forgiveness.
- Because maybe most importantly, our forgiveness of someone who has wronged us, really frees us and helps us to move on and heal, and, if we do not rise above our own wounds, we will simply pass

the wrongs done to us onto someone else! If we do not transform our pain, we transmit it onto someone else. Jesus knew a secret about life: We begin to heal when we let go of past hurts, forgive those who have wronged us, and learn to forgive ourselves for our mistakes. Forgiveness is a way to put life and energy back into our lives and push us towards a new newness.

The fact of the matter is, we do not grow when things are easy, but we grow when we face challenges and make mistakes. I remember once I was reliving a hateful and negative experience in my life over and over again, and a friend of mine said: "Why do you let that person rent space in your head!?"

At the moment I realized that, and even before I could actually forgive them totally, I started praying for them. Let me tell you my secret for practicing forgiveness... if there is someone in your life you need to forgive, start by praying for them. You can't stay angry with someone you pray for. Try it for yourself.

Living the Eucharist: October 9 through November 13

After last year's Alpha Program, parishioners asked what was next. To pick up where Alpha left off, every year we will try to promote an Alpha 201 type of program and focus on something specifically Catholic for Catholics.

We will also do Alpha again in Lent 2018 for those who did not participate last year, and the monthly Whole Community Catechesis program is also a great way to continue your spiritual journey into adult Catholicism.

Living the Eucharist will occur on the following Mondays: October 9, October 16, October 23, October 30, November 6, and November 13. All sessions will begin with a pot luck at 6 pm (bring a dish to pass) and the presentation and group discussions will be from 6:30 until approximately 7:30/8:00 pm. The three primary presenters will be Fr. Fred, Joe Frankenfield, and Jerry Green. The topics are as follows: Topic 1 – Why Do We Gather for Sunday Eucharist? Topic 2 – Who's at the Table? Topic 3 – What Happens at Sunday Mass? Topic 4 – The Dynamic Role of the Holy Spirit. Topic 5 – How Do I Respond? Topic 6 – What Changes?

Living the Eucharist is a dynamic, parish-based program designed to help revitalize parish life and mission through a more profound experience of Sunday Mass. It helps the entire parish—adults, teens, and families—grow in their Catholic faith and live more fully as missionary disciples of Jesus.

We Catholics always need to renew our experience of the Sacrament of the Eucharist as a mystery to be **believed**, a mystery to be **celebrated**, and a mystery to be **lived**.

Living the Eucharist renews and heightens parishioner involvement in the Sunday Eucharist, helps parishioners connect the celebration of the Eucharist more closely with the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church, and inspires them to live more intentionally as missionary disciples of Jesus during the week.

Living the Eucharist will have a similar format as the Alpha program and have a meal, followed by a presentation and group discussion. **There are many goals in Living the Eucharist program:**

- Learn about the true meaning of the Mass.
- Better understand the rituals and symbols of the Eucharist.
- Discover new ways to make the Sunday Mass come alive during the week.
- Grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ together with your fellow parishioners.

Since we will once again provide free meals for both Alpha 2018 and Whole Community Catechesis, we are asking that those who want to participate in Living the Eucharist bring a dish to pass.

Anointing of the Sick Mass:

We will have an Anointing Mass Saturday and Sunday, October 14th and 15th at our regular weekend Mass times. Look for more information on this next week.