

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 14, 2010

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Good morning. Today while we listen to probably the most famous readings in the Gospel there is a danger. That because we have heard it so much it goes in one ear and out the other. It seems like we already know it. Yes, God invites us back and we are loved, okay we get it. We have heard it again, and again and again. So what happens is that danger, again like I said, it just becomes part of who we are and we don't really let it enter in. What we really have to do is focus in on what's happening today. We are focused on the son who wanted to do it his way and the father who let him. That is often the way it is. I was just down in Fairfield this past weekend. I did a Parish Mission; and I was in Columbus and where I was the week before. I have no idea what is going on. But anyway as we are sitting there and I usually talk about confession. I do my Passion Talk and everything else and I am more and more convinced that the number one problem in the church today is the people who go to church all of the time, not the people that don't come – that is different reality – but the people that go to church all of the time have lost the real sense of their own sinfulness. They compare themselves to everybody else who don't go to church. They compare themselves to the politicians they don't like. They compare themselves to the people committing adultery. They compare themselves to the people who are pro-choice. They compare themselves to everyone they don't agree with and then they go, "Hmm, compared to them I am a saint. We get this little righteousness like the oldest son, the first born son, we get this little bit of "humph are you kidding me." But again though we are all in the boat of being the sinner and the sinner is the one who does things his own way. That is what he boy wanted. He said, "Listen, I love you dad. You love me, this is great but I want to live life my way not your way. I don't want to take care of the cows for you. I wanted to go do what I want. Some people even the ones that go to daily Mass, even priests, even nuns, even the ones who would not miss Mass on Sunday at all, still like to live life their way. I will live my Catholicism my way. I will follow things the way I was taught. This is the way I was taught. And because this was the way I was taught, it is the way I am going to do it because if I was taught it, I like it. I am comfortable with it. It is my way of following Jesus. But again that is sin. When a person does things their way, whether it be living life their way, Catholicism their way, I Spirituality their way they are setting up an idol – themselves and they are not choosing the Father. So what finally happens today in the Gospel it says, "Coming to his senses at last he returned," where – "to the father."

You see repentance is not just saying oh I am sorry because I don't want to go to hell. So compared to what happens they tell me if I miss Mass, if I do this, if I commit a mortal sin, I am going to hell, okay I am sorry. I don't want to go to hell. Well sorry, that is not what the boy did today. He returned to his father. And then he knew when he returned to his father he could not just come in righteously and say, "Okay dad I did it my way and I'm going to continue to do it my way." He comes into his dad and says, "I am not worthy to be called your son. Treat me as you would a servant or a hired hand." So what he is now saying to his father is, "Father I will be your servant. I will do it your way. I will do whatever you command. I am here to serve you now." And notice when he does this when he comes before God the Father and he says I am now willing to do it your way." God the Father lifts him up and restores him to sonship. So what has to happen to all of us we have to be really repent of the daily things in our lives. And until we know in the depths of our being that what I deserve is damnation, I know that in the depths of my being, then I will never be truly grateful for all the things He has done for me. When I

compare myself to the other people in the world I am always going to look great. I am always going to look wonderful. I am always going to look holy. But when we compare ourselves to Christ we compare ourselves to am I doing things my way or the will of the Father? Then we all have to acknowledge that we like to do it our way. I love to do things my way. Have you ever been able to tell that? That is the reality and so that is the core of my sin. But, it is also the core of your sin. We have got to know that and then we have got to come before our Father and say, "Father, I don't want to do it my way. I want to be your servant. I want to do it Your way." And when we humble ourselves before Him, then He lifts us up. That is the very first thing we have got to do is humble ourselves before Him every day and say Lord I am tired of doing it my way. I want to do it your way. That is the first thing.

The second thing that happens we get from the last line of the second reading. Did you all hear the last line of the second reading? "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin that we might be the very righteousness of God. So now more than just having the fatted calf, God the Father forgives us by the death of His Son. So what happens to you and me is that we are saved by grace. That we are saved by what Jesus Christ did for us not by ourselves. We have to acknowledge how much we need Him. Notice the son does not come in. He can't demand anything from the father. He can't demand anything and neither can we. But what happens is God the Father looks at us and our sins that demand the justice of God. One sin people, just one. One mortal sin, just one in your life and my life, just one, deserves eternal damnation. One. If you committed one mortal sin in your life you deserve hell. Period! You can argue with that but you are wrong. This is the teaching. One mortal sin. So, one mortal sin sends you and me to hell. One! What happens is God the Father says, "Listen, I would rather die than to live without you." And so He does in His Son. And He lets His Son fulfill the justice that we deserve. We deserve justice and hell and Jesus pays the penalty for us. And until we come to really know that we will never be truly grateful. If we really think that well compared to Satan or compared to Hitler I am a good person so when I die I deserve heaven. Then I am not going to be grateful for Christ in my life. I am not going to be thankful for sanctification. I am not going to be grateful for all of the things He has done for me. I am really going to deserve it. And oh yeah, I am glad you died for me too. But really I deserve it. Really I was a good person. Really I never missed Mass on Sunday. And really I tried to obey Your commandments. So really I deserve heaven so let me in. Until you and I know that in the depths of our being, without Jesus I would be separated from the Father forever, that is what Christianity is. Someone died for you.

And again I have used it before but let us say you are walking across the street. As you are walking across the street some nut is driving a hundred and ten miles an hour up the road. It could be the pastor from St. Joe's. And as they are driving up and you are standing there you go AAAHHHHH! Then someone pushes you out of the way and then they die. Well, for the rest of your life what would you be....you would be grateful. See, that is what we have got to be. What the word of God calls us today is to first acknowledge our sinfulness. To acknowledge we have done it our way instead of God's way. To come back to our Dad. To let our Father cover us in the blood of His Son. And then to live a life of gratitude. That we come and start living. If someone came and pushed you out of the way and you lived and they died for the rest of your life you would cry out, "I should be dead but I am alive." You would really want to live life to the fullest so that that person did not waste his life or her life on you, right? You would really live life. And for the rest of your life you would have that gratitude. Again, that is what Paul says in Galatians 2:19, well it goes to 20, "Who loved me and gave His life for me."

You see this is what reconciliation is about. This is what Lent is about, that we come running back to our Father. It is coming back to Him. Not coming because of sin. It is relationship, Dad. I run back to my Father. And our Father embraces us and then He pays for our sins in His justice with the blood of His eternal Son, then Jesus covers you with His blood. Now our job after we receive that gift of Jesus that we can be reconciled and become the very righteousness of God is now we live a life of gratitude. Thank you Lord. I should be dead but You have given me eternal life. Thank you Lord. And I now focus not on my past or my sins. And think about it, some of you as you are getting older the devil loves to remind you of your past. "Oh Father, when I was young at 18 I confessed this many times and every time I confess it I still don't feel forgiven." Well look at that when you say that. That means Christ's blood was not enough to cover your sins. Right? That means when you bring up something from your past from 20 years ago and you say that you are not sure if I am really forgiven for this, you are looking at Christ and saying, "Your blood wasn't enough." What that is people is it is subtle pride. And the devil brings that up to you to keep you focused on yourself and focused on your past. One drop of the blood of Jesus is enough to cover all of your sins. Only His blood is enough to cover your sins not what you do. You have got to let that sink in. Then you live that gratitude so that don't keep living in your past and keep focused on yourself. Boy, what I did. I am no good. I am going to go to hell because of that one. Because 20 years ago I am not really sure if I confessed it right or not. Stop it! Jesus covered it. You need to be grateful. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.