

HOMILY ~ 13th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME JULY 1/2, 2023

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Let’s spend some time today talking about what that means. We were created in the image and likeness of God, God who is a Trinity of persons, relational by his very nature. We are hard-wired to be in relationship with other people. God also created each one of us as a unique individual. There is no one exactly like you. We all have our own set of strengths and weaknesses. To become a saint, we need to become the best version of ourselves that we can be. That is what God wants for us. That means that we have to accept everything about ourselves. We need to accept our strengths and weaknesses. God does not expect us to be perfect. God wants us to be whole, and that means accepting everything about ourselves.

We have talked a lot about using our strengths, gifts, talents and charisms to love and serve others. We can also use our weaknesses to love and serve others. Example: Someone has an issue with drugs or alcohol. The first step in addressing this issue is self-acceptance. They have to accept that this weakness is part of who they are. If they have stopped using the drugs or alcohol, they can help others to do the same. Even if they have not totally stopped using drugs and alcohol, they can still help others with the same weakness. That is what Alcoholics Anonymous is all about.

As we live our lives, we learn not to accept certain things about ourselves. We hear from people in our lives or from social media things like: *you are not attractive enough, you are not good enough, you are not smart enough, you are not thin enough, you are not athletic enough, you are not smart enough, you are not straight enough, you are not feminine enough.* We hear these things, we believe them and we do not accept these aspects of who we are. We create a false self. We do that because we are hard-wired to be in relationship with others. We do this because we want to fit in. That is the life we need to lose so we can find our life. Self-knowledge, self-acceptance is a very important part of

the spiritual journey. Until we accept everything about ourselves, we will never be the person that God wants us to be; we will never be whole. Example: LGBTQ individuals. They have to accept who they are, and that can be hard in our culture. Judging them is not helping them. That is why I feel so strongly about not judging others on this issue and many others. It is not loving, and it does not help them. When we judge as Church, people can come to believe that the Church does not want them because of who they are. The Church should welcome everyone.

Now, we do change our behavior at times because we want to fit in. This is ok as long as we continue to accept who we are. Example: I am Catholic; I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I am in a social setting with someone who is atheist. I have to make a decision about what I am going to do if the topic comes up in discussion. We may have a discussion about our differences. I may learn more about how an atheist thinks. I may plant the seed and give them some things to think about. I may stop the discussion if it becomes clear that I am just disrupting a social situation for no reason. However, I will still accept myself as Catholic, as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Self-acceptance is important. We have to lose the life of a false self to find the life that God is calling us to live. Remember, we are hard-wired to be in relationship with others. We need to belong. Having a sense of belonging is one of our very basic needs. We will never belong anywhere until we can accept ourselves, our strengths and our weaknesses. Without self-acceptance, only our false self belongs, and that will never satisfy our need to belong. Once we accept ourselves, we will be able to use all of what we are to treat others with compassion. Compassion starts with empathy and then takes it a step further. Compassion starts with being aware of the distress of others, and then taking steps to alleviate the suffering.

So what do you think? Do you need to lose your life so that you can find it?

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim