

HOMILY ~ SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME FEBRUARY 10/11, 2024

In the Gospel Reading, a leper came to Jesus and begged him to cure him. Jesus was moved with pity and cured him. He told him to show himself to the priest, because that was the way someone who was cured with leprocy could re-enter society; but he told him not to tell anyone else. What did he do? He told everyone who would listen. Why did he do that? I think, if I were cured by Jesus from a terminal illness, I would want to spread the good news as well; and in general, I think we should be spreading the good news of our faith and our Parish. I think Jesus told him not to tell anyone because then everyone was coming to him to be physically healed, and he was not able move about freely and do the ministry that he came to do. Jesus did not come to earth to become a fabulous physician. Jesus came to earth to save us, to show us how to meet our spiritual needs and how we can get to heaven. The leper will get sick again and die. His soul is eternal.

Our theme for Lent this year is *"Build a Better Life."* To have a better life, we need to have our physical, psychological and spiritual needs met. I think we spend a lot of time and effort having our physical needs met. This includes our physical health: the work we do to earn a living; the material possessions we need to live a comfortable life; the things we need to do to support our families. I think the majority of our time and effort is spent meeting our physical needs. Next comes our psychological needs. We get help for anxiety and depression. More and more people are seeking counseling and therapy to get through difficult times in their lives. We make sure our children feel safe and secure. I think we give our psychological need less of a priority than our physical needs. Then comes our spiritual needs. In many cases, our spiritual needs get the time and effort that is leftover after our physical and psychological needs are met.

Lent is a time when we focus on our spiritual needs. We like to do something for Lent. I bring this up today before Lent starts because I want you to give it some thought. I want you to pick a new good habit that you would like to develop during Lent. A habit is something you do without thinking about it. Researchers tell us that 43% of what we do every day we do by habit; and if they are good habits, this is a very good thing. If you do something consistently during Lent and even during the Easter Season, it will be a good habit by the end of Easter. To make something a habit, you need to do it repeatedly on a regular basis. The more uniformly you repeat the activity, the stronger the habit will become. If you can build in an

immediate reward, it will strengthen the habit. Once you develop the habit, you can drop the reward. It is no longer needed. We focus on the three pillars of Lent: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving, so let me give you a few examples.

Let's start with Prayer. If you are not coming to Mass every weekend and would like to make it a habit, commit to coming to Mass every weekend during Lent and Easter. Come to the same Mass every weekend. Come with the same people and sit in the same seat. Give yourself a donut after Mass if that is rewarding for you. Go out to breakfast after if that is rewarding. If you do this, you will have a new habit of attending Mass by the end of the Easter Season. Maybe you want to develop a habit of personal prayer. Pick a time, maybe 15 minutes, do it every day at the same time every day and do the same form of prayer. The "Little Black Book" may be good if you like these short meditations. If you do this every day during Lent, you will have a new good habit of personal prayer. The problem with this is that the "Little Black Book" ends on Easter. So buy another book of meditations or change to a different form of prayer at that time. If you want to build in an immediate reward, pray in a particular place you find comfortable and prayerful. I pray sitting in the same comfortable chair each morning, I play soft music that I like and I burn a candle that smells good. This is a pleasant experience for me and is rewarding in itself.

Next Fasting. Let's fast from social media during Lent. Social media is the junk food of social interactions. Let me explain. If you are hungry, you may drive through McDonalds or grab a bag of chips. This will satisfy your hunger momentarily, but you will be hungry again in a couple of hours because you have not met any of your nutritional needs. Social media may satisfy your hunger to have some social contact with another, but it will never satisfy because it will never meet your social needs. You may cut out social media all together, but you may not be able to do that. Pick something very specific and repeat it every day. Pick one social media and delete the others. Put very specific limitations on it, i.e. no social media during the week; no social media in the morning; no social media in the evening; limit social media to a half hour per day. Pick something you can accomplish. During the time you used to spend on social media, call a friend or family member. This will be a reward in itself because this social interaction will meet your social needs.

You want to "*Build a Better Life?*" Develop a new good habit during Lent.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim