

HOMILY ~ 16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME JULY 20/21, 2024

Who do you follow on social media? The only social media I am on is Instagram because I want to see what Connie posts for St. Edith, but I must admit that I have recently gotten sucked into scrolling. The other day I saw a post for this combination of mushrooms that if you mix it with your coffee in the morning, you can lose 30 lbs. in a month without changing your diet or exercising. It is all natural. It is something that doctors do not know about. It sounded pretty good so I pressed the “learn more” button, and they made it sound really good. Then I started thinking about it. If you are taking something to make you lose weight, it must be doing something to your digestive system to prevent it from absorbing nutrients. How can that possibly be good for you? You would essentially be making yourself sick. I suppose that would be one way to lose weight, but I would not recommend it. Just because it is natural does not make it safe; and if it is so great, why do the doctors not know about it? The other possibility is that it does not work, and you would just be wasting your money. Now I am getting a bunch of postings for weight loss products because I clicked on that one.

There is a lot of misinformation out there. I think I need to stop scrolling. All of the negativity on social media is causing a lot of anxiety and depression, even suicide, especially in our young people. I heard about a study of the type of person that makes these negative posts. Essentially, they found that the people who are jerks on social media are jerks in real life. The difference is in real life, these are the people we stay away from. On social media, they have a platform. You may think the posts are funny or entertaining or you are just curious on social media, but not in real life. Be careful who you follow.

In the Gospel Reading today, Jesus sees the crowds and *“His heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.”* I wonder what Jesus thinks when he sees who we are following on social media, like sheep without a shepherd? We have someone great to follow in Jesus. Jesus will never give us misinformation, and he will not be negative to us. He only loves us.

We can follow Jesus in many ways, but I want to talk about two of them that are based in Ignatian Spirituality. The first is called the **Examen**. You need to review your day each day in prayer and look at the following five areas. I would suggest you do this at the beginning or the end of the day. If you do it every day, it only takes about five minutes.

1. **Gratitude:** Recall anything from the day for which you are especially grateful and give thanks.
2. **Review:** Recall the events of the day, from the start to the finish, noticing where you felt God's presence, and where you accepted or turned away from any invitations to grow in love.
3. **Sorrow:** Recall any actions for which you are sorry.
4. **Forgiveness:** Ask for God's forgiveness. Is there someone you need to apologize to?
5. **Grace:** Ask God for the grace you need for the next day and an ability to see God's presence clearly.

This can be particularly helpful with individual conscience formation. There is a difference between knowing the rules and figuring out how you are going to live them out.

We also talk about discerning God's will. Now there are whole volumes written about this, but I just want to give you a couple of things that I have found helpful. First, you are only discerning God's will if you have to decide between two things that are both good. If it is a decision between something that is good and something that is bad, you always must choose the good. These usually involve some of the bigger decisions you make in your life. One of the decisions I had to discern was whether to stay at St. Priscilla or move to St. Edith. When they called to ask me to move, they told me that they wanted me to go to St. Edith and help the people heal after Fr. Mike's death. They told me to pray about it for a week and then let them know. I started by writing down the positives and negatives of each. Then you need to pray with this information. You cannot take a mechanical approach. You cannot just pick the option with the most positives. It does not work that way. After doing this, I still could not discern God's will. Next I pretended to make the decision that I was going to move to St. Edith and live for the next week as though I had made this decision. I will have to leave a Parish where I know the people, and I am comfortable. I would have to leave the leadership team that I had put together. I would have to live in a new house. I would have to leave all the programs I started and hope they would continue. This is the practical application. By the end of the week, the only real positive thing about moving to St. Edith is that I did think I could help people heal after Fr. Mike's death. At the end of the week, it was clear to me that God was not calling me to stay where I was comfortable; he was calling me to go where I could do the most good. Watch who you follow. I am following Jesus. How about you?

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim