

Homily for the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last week, if you were here, you know that I gave you an update on how things were going for me health-wise – that in these recent months I have been struggling with anxiety in my life – something I have not had to confront before. I want to thank you for your prayers and support, especially those of you who've shared with me your own struggles with anxiety – in person and in cards. I really have found this very helpful!

Well, in all of this, I've also realized something else about myself – something that has contributed to this anxiety – that I'm a perfectionist. Again, I'm sure that more than a few of you can probably relate to this too. Perfectionism is when you want everything to go just perfectly, and you think everyone expects things to be perfect. The problem with this type of thinking is that it places such an unnecessary burden on a person – one that is not healthy and one that God Himself doesn't desire.

Relating this to our 2nd reading today from Galatians, we hear St. Paul write those words that are so true: "We who know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." Now, Paul was speaking here primarily to Christian converts from a Gentile background who lived in Galicia. They started getting this erroneous idea that in order to be Christian, first they would have to embrace the Jewish practice of circumcision and obeying all the dietary regulations. However, this was absolutely not necessary. In fact, it was actually contrary to the Gospel, because putting your faith in these practices of Moses from the Old Testament, would mean not putting your faith in Jesus Christ and His saving sacrifice on the cross for us. Thus, in today's reading, we hear about this back and forth about the Law and faith.

Well, applying this lesson to perfectionism, we can see something similar unfolding. To place your trust in everything going perfectly and exactly according to plan is to place your trust in yourself and your own efforts to make everything just right. It takes the focus off of Jesus, who as God, is the only perfect being anyway. To place our faith in Jesus is to say, “Lord, I love and accept myself just as I am – with all my flaws and weaknesses – because you love and accept me just as I am. I need you as my Savior, to save me not just from sin, but from all my tendencies to put my focus on that which is not you – to put my focus on performance and on myself.” And when we surrender ourselves to the Lord in the concrete experiences of life in such a way – like when I’m worrying whether I will preach this homily perfectly – which I am doing – then He truly becomes the Lord of our lives. And we find as St. Paul says today that “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me...I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.”

I want you to know that I’m sharing with you some of these personal weaknesses and struggles to let you know that you can do the same. We do not have to pretend that we have to have life all together, or that we just have to resign ourselves to our fallen tendencies. God knows our deepest needs – He knows us better than we know ourselves. That’s why He sent us His Son. So, have hope. Jesus truly wants to help us become the men and women His Father created and redeemed us to be. He will be faithful to His side, but we must take the risk to step into His light; to seek the truth; and thus experience His healing love. God bless you.