

Homily for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wow! How about that second reading today? Did you hear those words of St. Paul to the church in Philippi, that is, the Philippians? “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.” *Do nothing out of selfishness, but regard others as more important than yourself!* Um, can we just ignore this?

Now, when I came across the word ‘vainglory’, I was tempted just to pretend like I really knew what it meant. I mean, it’s not a word that we use all that frequently nowadays. So, I looked it up. The definition is “inordinate pride in oneself or one’s achievements; self-absorption”. So clearly like St. Paul says, we can’t be selfish, self-absorbed, and full of vainglory, and regarding others as more important than ourselves at the same time. They’re kind of mutually exclusive, you know?

And it is so easy for us to become so focused in on ourselves. I mean, have you seen that commercial from Xfinity where the family is sitting at the dining room table? Dinner time is supposed to be a chance to talk to one another and see how each other’s day went. Instead, the members of this commercial family all have their faces buried in their smart devices. So, mom turns off the Wi-Fi, and they all look up to actually find each other.

Why do we do this? I mean, why do we focus so much on who our friends are, what they say about us on social media, what plans we have for the weekend, where we're going on vacation, the games we play, the TV shows we watch, the technology we have? Why? Because we think this will make us happy. I mean, we all want to be happy. So, we think if we just put ourselves first, then we'll be able to safeguard our happiness, and protect our little kingdoms of fun and pleasure.

But, St. Paul says "Do nothing out of selfishness, but regard others as more important than yourself!" Who are these "others"? Well, given that this is Respect Life Sunday, I was thinking of the following categories of people, among others: unborn children; people of different races or religions; people of the "other" political party; people with behavioral problems or mental illnesses; people in prison; the poor; people who cut us off in traffic; people who are rude to us at the store, etc., etc.

You know, in my own life, I have come to learn that pleasure is often fleeting, and happiness usually depends on things that come to an end or people who eventually go away. But, the joy the Lord gives us when we really focus on the needs of others brings real fulfillment that endures. For example, just sending someone a little gift card in the mail anonymously, or visiting someone you know who's sick or going through a tough time, or giving of your time to volunteer to serve others.

Yes, it'd be easier just to stay wrapped up in our cocoons of self. But, when our focus is on Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, then regarding others as more important than ourselves actually brings us joy! Let me just say that it takes real faith to believe that actually living my life for others and not myself will bring me the true happiness I'm really looking for. But over 10 years of priesthood I have found this to be truer and truer with each passing year.

My friends, like the second son from today's Gospel, it's not just enough for us to *say* we'll do God's will; we actually have to do it. Putting our faith into action is what it means to be mature disciples of Jesus, so that we can know, and share, the joy of the Lord more fully. God bless you.