

## Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

I believe I shared with you all once before about my first experience of working with clay on a pottery wheel. Well, in case you didn't hear, long story short – it's not as easy as it looks. In fact, I learned through personal experience that if you don't put enough pressure on the lump of clay to shape it, nothing happens. But I also learned that if you put too much pressure on the clay, then it goes flying all over the place, and you have a big ole mess on your hands.

Well that memory came back to me, since last Sunday we heard in our Scripture readings that “the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” Indeed, we human beings are created from the clay of the earth by God, our master Potter. We are clay in His hands. And the Scriptures time and again paint the picture of this truth. Take for example the Prophet Isaiah, who says, “Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.” Or take our readings today. Abram is called by God to leave his homeland and travel to the land of Canaan, and we see God molding him into Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel. On top of that, we have the Twelve, who are formed into Jesus' Disciples by such experiences as the Transfiguration we heard about in our Gospel today. God indeed is our Potter, the one who constantly desires to shape us into the image and likeness of Jesus, His beloved Son.

Now, I didn't share this with you before, but I've learned a great deal more about clay than just how to make a mess with it. In fact, I've learned that in order to make a vessel or something out of it, you need more than just a pottery wheel and lots of patience. First, you need a vision of what it is you want to design – a goal you're working towards. And this is certainly true with our God, who actually has a particular purpose and plan for each one of us in our lives – He really does! When I was younger, I wanted to be a meteorologist. But, the master Potter had another forecast for my life. And now here I stand. God desires to form us up into His beautiful masterpieces, flourishing in the plan He has for us.

Another thing I learned is that clay has to be soft for you to really be able to work with it. Obviously, if the clay isn't soft enough, it won't be pliable enough to mold. And I think you can see the same is true in our relationship with God: if we don't sincerely open our hearts to Him and allow ourselves to be truly vulnerable before Him, then we don't give Him much to work with. And so we end up experiencing all these twisting and turning forces in our lives by which He tries to get us clay to a place where we can be better shaped.

But even should we allow our hearts to get too hardened, God can still work with that clay too. It's pretty neat, actually. I saw on Youtube how clay that has become rock hard, also becomes extremely brittle and breaks very easily. And even though it's not workable in the least, the artist doesn't throw the clay away. Instead he or she often breaks it into pieces, throwing them into a garbage can filled with some water. And little by little, the dry clay soaks up the water, becoming soft enough to work with again. The same is true with God, our master Potter: He doesn't throw away His living clay, saying it's just too far gone! Rather, He wants to restore us. And our lived experience of this can be just like the potter, who breaks down the clay to prepare it for reconstitution. We can feel like God just allows us to be broken, and sometimes even fall into pieces. And we might wonder, "Why would He allow such things to happen to the living lumps of clay He loves so much?" But I truly believe this is in an effort to bring us to a place where we can again become malleable so God can continue the process anew.

But there's one last thing you need to work with clay, and that's a kiln. The interesting thing about fire is that it can either destroy or transform. For example, fire can completely destroy a house. Or it can purify precious metals, and strengthen other materials, like clay. The fire of the kiln dries out the clay, but in such a way as to make it more resilient and durable. A similar reality is true in our lives with respect to God, our Potter. He allows us to be tested and to experience trial by fire in order to strengthen our virtuous character, to increase our resolve to follow Him, and to reinforce our faith to cling to Him out of necessity.

Yes, it's easy to say all these things. And yes, it all sounds nice. But, it's also very true too. God is our Potter, and we are His clay. Sometimes we might want to be our own potters and mold ourselves as we prefer. But the problem is that we do not have the same vision or the eternal perspective that God has. And so, as we continue our journey through this season of Lent, let us really seek to make ourselves vulnerable before God – opening our hearts, our minds, and every aspect of our lives to Him – all so that He can mold us and more fully dwell within these sacred vessels of His that we are. God bless you.