

## Homily for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Every once in while a regular everyday experience happens by which God reveals to me some deeper truth. For example, the other day I was over in the priests' residence, a.k.a. the rectory. There's a little chapel in there, and I was praying, when all the sudden I heard this "zzzzz". Looking up, I saw this over-sized fly zooming along. There was no doubt in my mind that it was desperately looking for an escape route, which is probably why it kept banging into the window again and again. I thought, "If only it would let me catch it, I could let it outside; otherwise, it's probably just going to die inside the house, maybe being fried on a light bulb or something like that." I could see the big picture, couldn't this bug? And so donning my Franciscan concern for this pesky creature of God, I thought I would try to catch it. But can you imagine – it fled away?!

Well, a day or so later I came into the chapel to pray, and I noticed that same fly still zipping around, although noticeably slower than the day before. After a while it took a break on the floor, and I dropped a little holy card down to see if it would climb on it. I think it knew I was watching, because it would walk up to it and then back away, again and again – until one time, it finally climbed onboard. I picked up the card and walked to the door and let the thing go, and it was finally home free!

OK, so where's the profound, deeper significance in this you might wonder?

Well, it struck me that this fly had no idea that there were very few chances of it getting out of the house alive on its own. Its only hope was to keep flying into the window again and again hoping that one time it would get through. It didn't realize that if it would just let a human help, it could have found freedom a lot sooner – either that or wind up on the bottom of a fly swatter.

Ready for the profound connection? A similar experience seems to happen with St. Paul in our second reading today. We see Paul three times begging the Lord to take away a particular thorn in his flesh. This thorn may have been some type of physical ailment or psychological disturbance, or more likely some type of persecution by those attacking Paul and his missionary efforts. We don't know for sure what it was. According to Hebrew numerology, the number three signifies that his pleas before the throne of God should have been sufficient. But instead, this problem or difficulty or struggle just continued on.

But then St. Paul had a revelation, or a profound understanding of why his prayers seemed to go unanswered. Paul heard the words from God: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” The light bulb went off, and Paul realized that this particular thorn may have been stronger than him, which is why it caused him great distress. But, God was stronger than that thorn. And so by accepting his own inability to change such a discouraging situation, Paul asked God instead to be His strength. In this, Paul lets God do for Paul what Paul cannot do for himself.

Of course this same lesson can be applied to ourselves. We try all the time to do things our own way too. For example, maybe someone struggles with anger, and after blowing up yet again, he or she blames it yet again on the other person – if they wouldn't have done such a thing! Or perhaps it's someone struggling with alcohol or lust or another bad habit – “next time I'll just do things differently”, they say to themselves. We try to handle things by ourselves, using all the will-power and good intention in the world, when all along God wants to show us a better way.

His way is often not to take away our suffering or difficulties in life – after all paradise is not in this present life, but in the world to come. Rather, God wants us to learn after the example of His Son: In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked that the cup of suffering pass from Him *if* it be His Father's will, just like St. Paul did. But as we know, it had to be that Jesus suffer and die on the cross. And it was by bearing such suffering with the faith that the Father's will was what was paramount that Jesus brought salvation to the world.

My brothers and sisters, sometimes we think we know what is best. The world tries to hypnotize us into believing that all suffering is bad, and therefore nothing good can come from it. Or we may think that God should take away all our thorns, like St. Paul did. Or we may think we know best like the fly crashing into the glass time and time again. But the thing is, we can't see the big picture, and we can't understand everything. Therefore, it's OK to be weak. It's OK because when we admit our weakness before God, He becomes our strength. And He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. But I am here to say, we will never admit our weakness and trust God enough unless we really seek to have a living, personal relationship with Him. Unless we become like that little child who trusts his father so much that he will jump off the top of a wall into his arms, we will never take the leap of faith required to have Him truly become our strength. God bless you.