

Homily for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Yesterday, I offered the funeral Mass for my uncle – my mother’s brother. He was also my godfather, and died after a long battle with cancer. This was my first family funeral since I’ve been ordained a priest, and I have to admit it was more challenging than I anticipated in lots of different ways.

One of the things I’ve come to discover about funerals is that you many times get to learn more about the person you knew from the stories that others have to share. For example, my uncle was the Battalion Chief of the Allentown Fire Department for many years. The story was told of one incident in the 100 block of Linden Street, to which my uncle and other firemen responded. Apparently, an elderly woman fell down her basement steps, and upon her tumble to the bottom, knocked off the natural gas pipe that supplied her house. Surely enough, the basement filled with natural gas, which quickly began to rise to the floor above. Sitting at the top of the steps, though, was also a space heater – plugged in and turned on. Upon arriving, my uncle went into the house – and fully aware gravity of the situation – prudently calculated the risk, and descended the stairs to stabilize the problem at hand. He plugged up the pipe with a rag, and so doing, was able to cut off the flow of gas and avert a major catastrophe. Fortunately, everyone made it out safely – and no children in the dare care next door were harmed either.

Truly first responders, like my uncle, are men and women of courage.

Courage is one of those virtues that doesn't get mentioned much anymore. Traditionally, it's referred to as fortitude. And it's one of the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit that are first given to us at our baptism.

Sometimes courage is confused with fearlessness – just kind of charging ahead like a bull in a china shop – “doing what needs to get done.” But fearlessness is one of the reasons they had to put cow catchers on trains in the early days for “fearless cows”. In case you don't know what I mean, cow catchers were devices on the front of trains, kind of like a triangular wedge of steel, which kind of shunted off to the side any cows wandering on to the track looking for greener grass. They were particularly necessary, though, for certain bulls, which would sometimes fearlessly charge the oncoming threat steaming toward it. Fearlessness is not the same as courage.

Real courage, to the contrary, enables us as Christians to do what is right, whatever the consequences. Many times we *know* what is right or wrong to do because our consciences tell us. But, at the same time, there's often a whole host of other things going on, that sometimes keep us from *doing* what we *know* to be right. Let's look at the Scriptures this week.

In the first reading, we find young Samuel, who hears God's voice calling him in the middle of the night. Three times he gets up and goes to his master, Eli, thinking it's him who's been calling him. Can you imagine waking up your spouse or your parents three times in one night, asking them what they want? Would you be too embarrassed to get up yet again? But, how many times do we feel God guiding us some way in our lives, and yet we're afraid of what it might mean, and so we just roll over and tune Him out?

What about in the second reading today? Here, St. Paul is speaking to the early Christians in the port city of Corinth, a Greek city known for its loose ways and lack of morals. He says to them, "Brothers and sisters: The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body." Literally, in Greek, he tells them, "Brothers and sisters: The body is not meant for fornication". What courage that must have taken on Paul's part to write such bold words to these Christians, who he was trying to keep in the Church and not abandon the faith they had just received! Or what courage might it take for us Catholics today to follow the Church's teachings on sexual morality – issues like contraception or chastity, which have kind of become too taboo to mention even in church. Remember, courage is the strength to do what we *know* is right to do, and then *doing* it, whatever the cost or consequences, even if it involves sacrifice.

My friends, being a disciple of Jesus takes courage – it’s an adventure – and sometimes it feels like a maze. The good news is that Christ shows us the way through the Church. And He even gives us the means of following that way through the Holy Spirit’s gift of courage. Therefore, in these difficult times, we must stand up, in courage, for the things we *know* to be right – both in our own families, and in the larger society made up of these families.

Again, we often *know* what is right and wrong. But sometimes we might lack all the courage necessary to make a change or make a difference. Remember though, we have already been empowered with the Spirit’s gift of courage at baptism. It’s a gift that has been renewed through Confirmation. And it’s a gift we can always ask God for more of through prayer. So, may He grant us at this Mass today what we *know* we need. God bless you.