

2nd Sunday of Lent (A)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
March 11, 12, 2017

Many people think of the Catholic Church, as only a list of 'don'ts'. Some probably think this even of any Church. If you push them farther, most of their list of 'don'ts' have to do with marriage and sex. There is some truth to that; I am not going to argue otherwise. But as one radio commentator of days past used to say, now listen to 'the rest of the story' ... a 'list of 'dos':

- obey the laws of the Church consistently
- defend all life, not just the lives of those I think deserve it
- instill Christian values into our communities, families, and children, and practice them ourselves in the face of the contradictory values of American society
- support the church
- critique society
- defend belief
- be faithful
- face suffering and hardships with trust in God and without bitterness and blame
- reconcile and forgive, and cling to forgiveness as God's gracious presence
- be truthful and without rancor when the Church and members of the Church fail personally and collectively
- do penance that atones for our own and others' lack of obedience to the gospel

A list like this could serve as a 'recipe for discipleship'. It can also serve as a good examination of conscience prior to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is (tomorrow) (today). Such a list also contains what Jesus tried to instill in his apostles and disciples. Understandably the apostles and disciples found his words hard to accept...just as we do. This is also why from time to time Jesus would take them aside by themselves.

Picking up from last weekend, and our reflection on 'temptation', we can easily be tempted to ignore such a list. We get tempted to go along with others, and with society in general, saying "that is just the way things are today". Sometimes we even try almost anything to avoid hardships and difficulties rather than accept them as part of life, and particularly as a part of life in Jesus. We work to find ways to 'cut corners' in our allegiance to Jesus, even while knowing that the words "pick up your cross and follow me" are essential to discipleship. This is exactly what Matthew Kelly in his Best Lent Ever program, calls the power of 'resistance'. We think of every reason possible not to 'pick up our own cross and follow Jesus'.

But this is also exactly where the Transfiguration experience fits in, and where it plays an essential role. Jesus knew his disciples needed something to support them, some kind of experience to give them hope and courage. And we need the same.

During that Transfiguration experience, the three disciples hear the words that Jesus heard of himself at his Baptism: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” But then they also hear the all important words, “Listen to Him”. Why does God say that to the disciples, and how do we do that today? How do we listen to God?

It can be as simple as “sit still and stop telling God what you want Him to do”. The fact is, God wants more for you than you want for yourself. Believe it or not, God even wants heaven for you more than you want heaven for yourself. And if you and I listen, God will share with us what we need to hear so that we can one day be in heaven with Him. Yes, God will tell us what we need to do,and what we should not do,if heaven is ever to be our final goal.

Drawing further on Matthew Kelly, Matthew says that daily prayer is essential. We need a habit of daily prayer. But as soon as you decide on this, RESISTANCE will be your greatest enemy. You will think of every reason in the world why you cannot do this. This is because, as Kelly says, we do not want for ourselves the 'good' that God wants for us. Or at least we do not want it for ourselves as much as God wants it for us. Kelly reminds us that many things will come from a habit of daily prayer.... a better life ... a better marriage being a better parent ... Beware, however, RESISTANCE will suggest many reasons why you can't do this. It seems easier to drop a dollar in the Rice Bowl box than give time to prayer.

Matthew gives this example. On Thursday I will place \$1000 in a songbook in the 7th pew on the left-hand side of the church. It is yours if you will stop by and spend 10 minutes in prayer. And, it will be there every Thursday. Now be honest when is the next time you think you will miss a Thursday?

Listening to God seems like such a waste of time actually, you may think listening to a few others might also be a waste of time. Quite honestly, listening to some people may be a waste of time. But we should not get caught putting Jesus into that category.

Ask God to help you desire goodness, desire holiness, actually ask God to help you desire Him. That would be The Best Lent Ever!