

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ord. Time (A)  
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes  
February 4, 5, 2017

This past week three disconnected things somehow seemed to connect for me:

At Christmas you received this book, Resisting Happiness. It is an interesting title, and since then more than a couple of people have asked, 'Father, why should I resist happiness? As a matter of fact, you shouldn't! The point of the book is that we shouldn't 'resist happiness', but that too often we in fact do just that. We resist the happiness that Jesus wants to give us.

The last few months I have been reflecting on the notion of acedia. Acedia relates to a person's life in and with God. It is a part of spiritual theology. Acedia is a state of not caring or not being concerned with one's position in life. It is a state of listlessness or idleness. If not tamed, it can lead to not being able to perform one's duties in life, and even the sin of sloth. Its spiritual overtones make it related to but yet distinct from depression. In reading about it, I discovered these words of Cardinal Ratzinger (eventually Pope Benedict); he writes that modern man does not have the courage to attain his full grandeur (cf. Psalm 8).

“Man wants to be more realistic. But instead he acquires a sense of false humility. It is very common today. Man does not want to believe that God is concerned about him, know him, loves him, watches over him, is close to him.... It is astonishing to see how, in the beginning, man was tempted by pride: he wanted to be like God” (Gen. 3:5) Today there is a remarkable hatred among people for their own real greatness. ... We give ourselves to God (as children) but then find that fidelity to this gift of self is an insurmountable ordeal, and we lose interest.

The third are some words of the article from last Sunday's night's discussion on the Election: A Post Mortem. Stephen Pope, an ethics professor at Boston University says, “The most glaring weakness of American Catholicism is the anemic, impersonal and ‘love-impact’ character of many of our parishes. Churchgoers often treat their parishes as places where they 'go to Mass' once a week to fulfill a religious obligation sandwiched between breakfast and the NFL. My suspicion is that the majority of churchgoing Catholics experience their parishes as institutions for 'distributing' the sacraments. On the other hand parishes should be communities that help us develop mature, properly formed Christian consciences that can guide us in making political choices and in every other domain of our lives.

Three seemingly disconnected ideas, authors, sources, .... yet they came crashing together as a single unit and a single challenge when I thought of them in light of today's Scriptures:

*“If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.”*

Isaiah did not know that people more than 2000 years into his future would need

to hear and know these words in their time as well? Then of course, Matthew and his Sermon on the Mount:

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste ... it is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot/. ... You are the light of the world. Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”*

Remove oppression, false accusations, and malicious speech! Satisfy the afflicted! Be salt and be light! And hear all of this in light of how we 'resist the happiness offered, even promised, by Jesus, in light of the fact that we may just be an anemic people, interested mostly in 'fulfilling our obligation' in a parish that 'distributes the Sacraments. Could it be that we do deny or at least hide from our own real greatness, suffer from a false humility, or even that acedia, that a sense of not caring about spiritual things, has some kind of hold on us. We talk about being spiritual, but are we? We think of ourselves as disciples of Jesus, but are we?

The images of 'salt' and 'light' push us beyond ourselves. Salt of the earth, light of the world..... these are images that speak of gospel virtues emanating out to the world from within ourselves. What good are we for the world? What good is St. Athanasius for the broader community of Jesus and beyond? I gave you three disconnected things that seemed to just fall into place together for me this past week. Here is a 4<sup>th</sup>! In his sermon at the Prayer for Church Unity Service a week ago, Pastor John Molacek said:

*“In the past we had a certain 'luxury'. The Church was in power; aligned with and supported by empires and kingdoms, princes and governments. We believed that we were right, you were wrong and that was that....But the world has changed. Christianity is no longer the assumed norm. The Church is no longer propped up by governments and powers in any meaningful way. We are no longer on the rise. And to be honest I don't think our current situation is a bad thing. It is a different thing, and it can be a hard thing; but it is also a time filled with real opportunity for the Church. We have an opportunity to be God's people in a more radical way. To be truth tellers, to be peacemakers, to thirst after justice and righteousness, to walk humbly with God, which is so different from the walk of the world.”*

Our mission is to be salt and light! And our first task is to figure out what that means and how to do that. Our sign on the corner catches the eyes of people ... our lives must catch the hearts of people. How does my life, your life catch the heart of another? Are you willing to step forward and volunteer to be a disciple, someone who will study and share what it means to be a disciple today ... someone from whom gospel virtues emanate? Just being here, with all our buildings taking up almost an entire city block, isn't enough. Our buildings say, “we own this property”. But our lives must say “we love Jesus, and we want to share Jesus with you.” Our lives must catch the hearts of people. Salt? Light? Help us, Jesus, to be just that to all the world, and to do it for the glory of your name!