

21st Sunday cycle B August 26, 2018

Theme: “It is hard at times to accept Jesus in your Life”

I knew before I left on vacation I would be preaching this weekend, so I began preparing in early August. In last four week’s Gospels, we have heard from the gospel of John. The readings encompass the proclamation of Jesus “I am the Bread of Life” Beginning with the feeding of the multitudes and last week when Jesus proclaims, “I am the living bread come down from heaven, whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the World” John 6:51.

This week’s gospel begins after the disciples heard Jesus proclaim “This is the bread come down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” John 6:58-59. That statement created the response of “Many of Jesus’ disciples who were listening to say, “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” John 6:60.

We still are presented with this same choice. Do we follow or as some in Jesus’ day step away? We are here today but can you and I answer the question “Why am I here?” This is where the news

of the past two weeks of the PA Grand Jury Report and members of the church hierarchy resigning or being removed caused me to set my previous homily aside.

I pray we are all here because we believe in the Eucharist, the true presence of Jesus Christ, the Bread Come Down from Heaven. It is through, and I emphasize through, our priest (Fr. Albert) that the miracle of the bread and wine we offer becomes the body and blood of Jesus. Yet how can we not question the actions of our Catholic church who allow men who prey on the innocent to be the instrument of such a precious gift as the Eucharist?

Last month in my homily I pointed to the fact we are all called to be disciples. This begins and ends with our relationship with Jesus and how we live that relationship out in all our other relationships here on earth. I encouraged everyone to first think about your own life story and your relationship with Our Lord and our own faith journey. I then challenge you to share that story with others.

I would like to share a part of my faith story with you today as it relates to wrestling with the question I just posed. “WHY AM I HERE TODAY?”

As some may know I was born and raised as a Catholic in Erie Pa. I went to Catholic school for 8 years and lived a fairly normal middle-class life in suburban Erie. After graduating from high school, I went to Mass only if I could not avoid it and then only out of a sense of obligation to my parents. It was a time where change was happening all around. Don't trust the government, don't trust the old establishment institutions, don't trust the church and my personal mantra "DO NOT TRUST ANYONE OVER 30!"

Except for the over 30 does this not sound like today?

The following year a very wise OVER 30-year-old shop foreman pulled me aside and encouraged me to GROW UP. Go to college, join the military he told me. So, I joined the Army and vowed never to return to a place where it snowed or had so many Catholic churches. I experienced much in the military. Maturing as a man but moving further away from my faith. After I was discharged from the Army I decided to return to Erie a get a job and figured out what my next move in life would be. My mother was quite heartbroken when I told I had not been going to her or anyone else's church for years.

This is when she pulled the motherly guilt card on me. I still remember the line **“If you never do another thing for me again in your life will you go on a Curculio?”** It worked! On the 4 day retreat for men, I met a priest

Fr. Leon Muroski who on the 3rd night of the Curculio finally got me to accept his invitation to talk. After over 3 hours of giving him every unforgivable deed I had committed and my multiple reason the church could not be trusted. He simple concluded “You need to begin with trust in Our Lord” “I cannot forgive you, but Jesus will and does would you like the absolution of Reconciliation?” I in tears told him I had forgot the Act of Contrition. He again merely said “Jesus knows your sorrow and forgives you”

Now for the tie in, He is no longer a priest and is on the Erie Diocese list in the Grand Jury Report! Was that night a lie? Was the weigh that was lifted from my soul and spirit just a religious trick? Has my faith journey been for not?

I was not abused by him the manner that lost him his priesthood and freedom, but painful questions of doubt were there. There are many who raise questions similar to mine.

Here is truth. This man I trusted and knew as a friend did evil and horrendous things to innocent children. Yet I know that all that is good flows from the grace of God and the vessels of that grace that we are all call to be are flawed. As for the priests in those pages and beyond, they are flawed with an evil that has caused pain to too many. Does the verse “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” John 6:60. Ring true here? I want the man who brought me back to faith to be a saint, yet I must acknowledge I too am a sinner and will be judge on how open I have been to the love of God and the graces of the Holy Spirit. I pray I can continue as you will to cling to the words of Peter at the end of our gospel “Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” John 6:68-69.