

Homily
HOLY THURSDAY
March 29th, 2018

Since the tone of this Mass will change dramatically at the end, just after communion, I wanted to take a moment right now to say thank you:

- † To God, for each and everyone of you...
- † To God, for the opportunity and privilege that is mine to serve here...
- † To the wonderful people with whom I have the privilege of working and serving, each day and each week of the year...
- † And, more specific to this night and this week, to all who help to make these celebrations what they are: our parish staff, our many volunteers, and especially our music ministry...
- † PLEASE JOIN ME IN SHOWING THEM OUR THANKS...

(Pause)

Tonight begins what is called “the Holy Triduum.” The word “triduum” means, “three holy days.” We commemorate and we walk with Jesus through his suffering, death, and resurrection. That is why this is also called “the holiest week of the year.” It re-tells the story of how much God loves each of us. So, if you happen to be struggling with believing that God loves you beyond all measure, as you are, or that God forgives you of any wrong that you may have done, or if you’re tempted to think that your value is less than the value of someone else, please, please let these days be a reminder for you that you are indeed a wonderful creation, made in God’s own image; imperfect, as we all are, but wonderfully made.

Traditionally, we celebrate 3 specific gifts on this night: the institution of the eucharist, the institution of priesthood, and the gift of service. This is a special night for us as Catholics, because we recall the first moment of our highest form of praise: the moment in which, under the form of bread and wine, we meet the true presence of Jesus. We enter into communion with him and with each other. We meet Jesus in sacrament, and we meet Jesus in people.

My good friend and colleague, Father Tom Ranzino, sent me a text message a couple of years ago on this day. We've exchanged it every year since. I wrote, "I hope you have a great Holy Thursday!" He replied, "you too. See you at the table." That response was a reminder for me of the mystery of the connection that we share with millions around the world and with those who have gone before us. Whenever we gather to celebrate the gift of eucharist, no matter where that takes place, we do it in spiritual communion with each other and with our departed loved ones.

It's a special night for us as priests, a night of celebration, because we remember the gift of our calling and our ordination. In May, I will celebrate 30 years of priesthood. Being the first wedding I ever celebrated, my brother and his wife will also celebrate 30 years of marriage. The other night, as we sat outside with my Mom, listening to music and relaxing, we recalled certain legs of the journey, if you will, but both said in the end that we wouldn't trade it for anything. On this night, we as priests, also recall that we could not do what we do without you.

As a side note, regarding service, whenever our servers, readers, and I pray before each weekend Mass, we always begin with, "thank you, Lord, for the privilege that is ours to serve you and this community." As Jesus shows us tonight, serving is a privilege, and it is our calling. These are the 3 gifts upon which we focus tonight.

I would, however, ask us to consider for a moment another reality, one that we all need to remember, but unfortunately all too often forget. Toward the end of 2017, I was having a conversation with another priest about some of the things that we, as priests, struggle with at times. These are the things that you all probably struggle with also at some point along the way: stress, work, worry, depression, and how we deal with all of that. In reflecting on this, my priest-friend made a statement that immediately went to my NUMBER 1 spot on the list of the wisest things I'd heard in 2017. He said, "we are all broken in some way. When we forget that, then there is the potential for real pain."

Look at the broken-ness that is present in every scene of the Gospel this week:

- † Betrayal
- † Lying
- † Hatred
- † Prejudice
- † And the broken-ness of a good man's body, "even until death."

We hear one dear friend say to another dear friend, "I will follow you wherever you go. I will lay down my life for you." And we hear Jesus say back to him, "you know, I love you. I really do, love you. But no. You won't. You will pretend as if you never knew me."

As hard as it is to accept, that, sometimes, (Peter) is us. Jesus looked at Peter in his worst broken-ness and still loved him and accepted him. We, however, often do not do that. Rather than accepting someone's imperfection and broken-ness as a gift, we use it as a weapon. We do not seek to heal and build up. We unfortunately, at times, hurt and tear down. Sometimes we do not even realize it, while at other times, we know exactly what we are doing.

It does not matter to God:

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| † What someone's skin color is. | They are a gift... |
| † Where they work or what their financial status is. | They are a gift... |
| † What their sexual orientation is. | They are a gift. |
| † What someone's relationship history is. | They are a gift... |

We are all broken and imperfect in some way. Our families are all broken and imperfect in some way. Our journey—for each of us—has been smooth and straight at times and, at other times, as rough and bumpy and messy and misdirected as it could ever be.

Still, the journey is blessed. Indeed, there is grace in imperfection. Or, as Hemingway wrote, "...it is in the broken places where we are made stronger."

Jesus Christ freely allowed himself to be broken, "at the hands of sinners," as scripture tells us. He did so for 2 reasons: so that our broken-ness could draw life and dignity from his, and so that he could give himself to us, as bread for living. And he tells us tonight, "as I have done, now you also must do."

There is so much broken-ness in this church tonight and in the world, most of which we are not even aware. Remember, however, that, you do not need to know what cross someone is carrying in order to help them carry it.

There is enough broken-ness in the world. We DO NOT need to add to it. We DO NOT need to be a part of that. We DO NOT need to be a part of tearing down but lifting up.

CONCLUSION:

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I would not be where I am or what I am today, were it not for all of the people along the way who have accepted me in my:

- † imperfections...
- † poor choices...
- † my (at times) moments of stupidity and immaturity...
- † my traits and characteristics that will always be me...
- † my broken-ness...

I am so thankful for that, because it has lifted me up and helped me to get up “off the mat” more than once, and it has always modeled Jesus and his acceptance of the broken-ness that he showed others.

Truly, then, “as he has done, shouldn’t we also be willing to do?”