



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity - October 10, 2021

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Given the theme for today, "The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity", I thought it would be most appropriate to share the following story from Chapter 3 of Max Lucado's 1991 book, "In the Eye of the Storm":

"A boy went into a pet shop, looking for a puppy. The storeowner showed him a litter in a box. The boy looked at the puppies. He picked each one up, examined it, and put it back into the box.

"After several minutes, he walked back to the storeowner and said, 'I picked one out. How much will it cost?'

"The man gave him the price, and the boy promised to be back in a few days with the money. 'Don't take too long,' the storeowner cautioned. 'Puppies like these sell quickly.'

"The boy turned and smiled knowingly, 'I'm not worried,' he said. 'Mine will still be here.'

"The boy went to work - weeding, washing windows, cleaning

yards. He worked hard and he saved his money. When he had enough for the puppy, he returned to the store.

"He walked up to the counter and laid down a pocketful of wadded bills. The storeowner sorted and counted the cash. After verifying the amount, he smiled at the boy and said, 'All right, son, you can go get your puppy.'

"The boy reached into the back of the box, pulled out a skinny dog with a limp leg, and started to leave.

"The storeowner stopped him.

"Don't take that puppy,' he objected. 'He's crippled. He can't play. He'll never run with you. He can't fetch. Get one of the healthy pups.'

"No thank you sir,' the boy replied. 'This is exactly the kind of dog I've been looking for.'

"As the boy turned to leave, the storeowner started to speak but remained silent. Suddenly he understood. For extending from the bottom of the boy's trousers was a brace – a brace for his crippled leg.

"Why did the boy want the dog? Because he knew how it felt. And he knew it was very special.

"What did Jesus know that enabled Him to do what He did? He knew how people felt, and He knew that they were special.

"I hope you never forget that."



And Jesus asks for the same understanding, and compassion, and love

from His “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic” Church.

Something I read a while ago:

☞ **“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”**

The first part, “We make a living by what we get”, is self-explanatory. Nevertheless, it’s the second part, “We make a life by what we give”, that’s had me pondering its significance since the very first moment I laid eyes on it. Because it is so very true: We DO make a life by what we give. Actually, we make **two lives**:

☞ **someone else’s (that is, the recipient of our gift); and**
☞ **(get this) our own.**

So, please take note:

What we give has the power to change lives – ours included – for good **or for evil**. In other words, we can, literally, either make or break lives. Unfortunately, we can (and all-too-often do) give “gifts” to one another that are not particularly good to receive – as they cause intentional pain, and injury, and suffering.



Case in point:

One Sunday morning, a young couple came – for the first time – to a church. While they sat quietly praying before the service began, they were interrupted by two other people – who were 35-year members of the congregation – and told to move, as the young couple was sitting in “their pew.” Embarrassed, the young couple got up, walked out of

the church, and **never came back**.

And who could blame them?!?

Imagine: **two people who were so habitual (and so territorial) about where they sit in church (IN CHURCH!),** that they actually told another couple:

- ☞ **who was new to the congregation;**
- ☞ **who might be earnestly seeking a new spiritual home; and**
- ☞ **who may well be desperately in need of the healing touch of Jesus Christ in their lives,**

to go sit someplace else.

Imagine: **two people who had warmed the same pew space for 35 years** actually ordered these young newcomers:

- 👍 **these guests to be *welcomed*;**
- 👍 **these guests to be *honoured*; and**
- 👍 **these guests who were *SPECIAL* (not for *WHO they were* but for *WHOSE they were*),**

to move, as they were sitting in the “wrong pew”.

You know, it is extremely difficult for me (as a Christian, in general, and, as a priest, in particular), to understand how some people can sit for so long, so close to the cross of Jesus, but be **so very far from The Christ**. It makes me wonder why these two mean-spirited people even bothered coming to church, to sit in the same pew, every Sunday, for 35 years. (Apparently, these two people were so accustomed to handing out such nasty “gifts” to anyone who had the extreme misfortune of coming anywhere near them that, perhaps, that explains why so few people ever did.

Moreover, in the end:

- ☞ **the pain;**
- ☞ **the injury; and**
- ☞ **the suffering**

that these two people dished out only served to make their own lives

- ☠ **barren;**
- ☠ **empty; and**
- ☠ **devoid**

of any

- ♥ **kindness;**
- ♥ **compassion; and**
- ♥ **love.)**



But, as I said earlier, we can also give good gifts to one another – gifts that bring comfort, and healing, and joy.

Another case in point:

As young man – who was desperately trying to make his way back to faith in Jesus Christ – I began to attend a small, rural church. I sat in the very back pew, right on the aisle (so that, as soon as the service ended, I could scoot out the front door of the church without having to talk to anyone). Right after my third Sunday service at the “new” church, I started for the front door, as usual. However, my “escape route” was suddenly blocked by a big, smiling man who invited me out for coffee. Not able to come up with an excuse on the spur of the

moment, I reluctantly agreed and followed him in my car to the local Tim Horton's. Three hours (and many more smiles and tears) later, I remember thanking him profusely as we warmly shook hands, and then getting in my car, and driving home with this incredible spiritual "glow-on".

That day, that gentleman brought me much-needed comfort, healing, and joy. Furthermore, he made such an enormous difference in my life. For, truth to tell, had it not been for him, I might very well have "died on the vine" and left the church for good, as I was brand new in my spiritual journey, with one foot in Christ and the other still very much in "The World". Consequently, I was forever backsliding - and getting awfully tired of always feeling guilty for it. However, that three-hour coffee chat "sealed the deal" for me. I recall arriving home, falling on my knees, and rededicating my life to Jesus Christ. (Not surprisingly, that man and his wife sort of "took me in" as my spiritual guides and, eventually, close friends.)

Ultimately, though, he and I were called to take separate paths in our Christian journeys. However, about five years later, I happened to bump into him - now an ordained priest - at a Diocesan function. During the course of our conversation, I reminded him of that fateful Sunday a few years earlier when he had taken me out for a coffee. And I told him - in no uncertain terms - exactly what he had done for me that day, and what a huge difference he had made in my life.

Then, as I watched (or, rather, witnessed) his reaction - the surprised look on his face, the flushing of his cheeks, and the welling up of tears in his eyes - I knew, in that eternal, miraculous, instant that:

-  **he, also, had received comfort;**
-  **he, likewise, was brought healing; and**
-  **he, too, was filled with so much joy that he wept aloud as he hugged me.**



Today, The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity, we are called to be “holy” for this is what pleases God. Yet, in our Collect we pray:

“O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee:”

In other words:

Without God, it is impossible to please God.

Indeed, without God, we are like those pictured apart from Jesus by St. Paul in verses 17-19 of today’s Epistle Lesson (Ephesians 4:17-32):

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.”

Similarly, we are in the same sad, sinful condition of the man sick of the palsy, completely unable to get up from his bed (as described in verses 1-2 of today’s Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 9:1-18).

As a result, like the territorial pew-warmers, we find ourselves so far from the Christ because, in ourselves, we are not able to “please God”. For, as Jesus Himself cautions us in St John 15:5:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for WITHOUT ME you can do NOTHING.”

Therefore, in praying today’s Collect, we take Jesus at His Word and

ask His Holy Spirit to direct and rule our hearts. By so doing, we place our whole trust in Jesus Christ and **surrender ourselves** to Him, so that His Holy Spirit can accomplish our humble request. And so, like the big, smiling man at the small, rural church who played such a vital role in bringing a lost soul closer to Jesus, we can all work towards becoming (as St. Paul implores his readers in Ephesians 4:32):

“...kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”



But, exactly, how do we **surrender**? Well, it's a simple process, really:

- ☞ **First, we acknowledge our *sinfulness*.**
- ☞ **Second, we acknowledge our need *for a Saviour*.**
- ☞ **Third, we acknowledge our need *for a Lord*.**
- ☞ **And fourth, we ask the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ *to take COMPLETE CONTROL of our lives - and REALLY mean it.***

We literally “put on a new person” by clothing ourselves in Jesus Christ and thereby placing ourselves (and our lives) under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Only then are we healed of our “spiritual palsy” and begin to walk in newness of life. Likewise, today’s Epistle Lesson from Ephesians 4 is a clear call to all Christians **to walk in the Spirit** – to contrast the new life of the Spirit with the old life of “the world, the flesh, and the devil”.

Or, in short:

- ☞ **to learn how to give good gifts instead of bad; and**
- ☞ **to make (not break) lives, by bringing comfort, and healing, and joy to others.**

As St. Paul counsels his readers in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13:

“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May He strengthen your hearts.”

And again in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15:

“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.”

Lastly, in commenting on the story of Jesus’ healing of the man sick of the palsy – today’s Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 9:1-18 – author Evan Daniel wrote in 1901 in his 710-page treatise, “The Prayer Book: Its History, Language, and Contents”:

“As he, who had lost the use of his limbs, was at the word of Jesus enabled to arise from his bed and walk, so they who are spiritually paralyzed may, by seeking the help of the Holy Spirit, recover the use of the higher faculties, and walk in newness of life.”



This day then, this Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity, let us renew our belief in all that God the Father has done – and has achieved – for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

And let us seek, in all earnestness, the help of God’s Holy Spirit to enable us to walk in newness of life.

Remembering that all of God’s creatures are precious to Him:

- ☩ so precious, in fact, that He willingly became human – so that we might know Him better, and, in turn, that He might know exactly what it was like to be one of us; and
- ☩ so precious that He willingly gave up His life on Calvary's cruel cross – so that we, sinners all, might be cleansed from all our iniquities, and, in turn, that we might know eternal life with Him in Heaven.

Therefore, let us make no mistake about it:

- † Like the crippled boy who chose the lame puppy, God understands us completely.
- † Moreover, like that crippled boy, God has untold love and compassion for us.
- † And like that crippled boy, God Himself paid a great price to take us home.



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