

THERE'S WEARY AND THEN THERE'S WEARY

On occasion a parishioner will ask me about hearing confessions for so many years and listening to people pour out their sinfulness, if it gets me down. Or they will ask how does the priest handle the processing of a regular dose of selfishness and inappropriate human activity without its having a negative effect on him? My response is twofold. First, the grace of the sacrament of Holy Orders is real and it protects the priest from just such an occurrence. I am not making this up. This is very real. Second, when the priest listens he isn't taking in information in the confessional the way he listens when he is in ordinary conversation or even in the role of counselor to someone asking help. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest is primarily in the role of dispenser of the Lord's mercy. That is the purpose and the goal of the sacrament. The priest is not The Fixer or the Repair Man. He is the Consoler who delivers what is most needed, the forgiveness of God and the grace of a second chance.

That sacrament is a beautiful reality and a great gift. I believe it is especially helpful in my own life because I go to confession about every four weeks. If I go longer than that I find that it begins to affect me in my role of confessor and in my personal life too. The more I am in touch with my own sinfulness and need for Christ's pardon, the more likely I am to be the dispenser of his mercy to those who come to confess.

Sometimes I am asked how often people should go to confession. It varies. When you find yourself out of sorts and not being your best self. That is a good time. Before the great feasts of Christmas and Easter is a good time. But another time is when the world has got you down. I am going to call my priest confessor to celebrate the sacrament this week because the whole clergy bishop scandal is weighing down on me right now. Bad stuff. Entrenched bad stuff. Mishandled bad stuff. Conspiracies of silence bad stuff. Hypocrisy of the worst kind bad stuff. Misuse of the virtues and grace of the sacrament of Holy Orders. And sometimes at the highest levels. I feel like I am back in the medieval times when the Medici's and Borgias were sordidly in control of the Church.

Elijah the prophet is right there in today's reading. He is running to hide, to get away from the murderous queen whose false prophets he challenged and defeated

and who now wants to cut off his head. He is weary, weary beyond belief. He finds a shady tree and falls asleep praying for the Lord to take him. But the Lord doesn't take him. The Lord sends his angel (perhaps a caring human being) to bring him some food and drink. He eats and drinks and falls back to sleep. The Lord rouses him and tells him to eat some more and he will have the necessary strength to finish his journey. And triumph over Queen Jezebel. He does what the Lord says. And he is victorious. He travels to Mount Horeb, sometimes called Mount Sinai the holy mountain, where Moses experiences God in the burning bush and later receives the Ten Commandments.

The Lord fed Elijah. The Lord fed the people of Israel. The Lord still feed us. He feeds us with his mercy and forgiveness whenever we go to him. And He feeds us with his own love in the Eucharistic bread and wine, his Body and Blood. My friends, it is a very good day when we get to the point where we realize that we truly need Jesus Christ and we can't do this thing called life without his help. That is a very good day. Because when we admit we need his help and open ourselves to receive it, to receive his love, which is what we most need and which feeds us at the deepest part of us. That is a breakthrough day! Jesus is not optional. Jesus is not One to be put off or placed on the back burner. Jesus is the necessary and substantial food we need and actually cannot live without. We can't get to God without Him. He is the gateway to the Father and the very kingdom of God. Jesus is the One. He is the Bread of Life.