

GENTLE TRUTH

One of the wonderful blessings that priests experience as part of their priestly life and ministry is making an annual retreat for a week. Perhaps some think that a week is a really long time. And perhaps ask themselves what could I possibly do for a week? But I assure you that a week away from all the responsibilities and worries of your daily life, with no one pulling at you or pushing you is a truly wonderful experience. And once you do something like that you definitely want to do that again. I have gone to many different places for these Retreats.

I remember going to St. Ann's Retreat House up in Gloucester, Massachusetts right on the ocean. There was an 8 foot tide twice every day. I spent a good deal of time walking along the rocky coast and sandy beach. Great time for reflecting and talking to Our Lord. I found a piece of driftwood and took it to my room. As my Retreat progressed I began to sense the Lord was asking me to renew my desire to live in His Truth and to speak His Truth. But not to use His Truth as any kind of a club or cudgel or weapon to beat people up. Rather to live and speak the Truth but in a manner imitating Christ, with a gentleness. Gentle Truth. They were the words that I took from that Retreat. I was to live my life in Gentle Truth. I carved those words into the driftwood. I sat it on my desk and I looked at it every day. Those words began to be some of the words by which I tried to live my life and minister as a priest. Then my dad died. It was July 1981. He was my rock. He was a really good dad. A really good man. And his way was also a man of Gentle Truth. That dawned on me as I prepared his funeral homily. I got the piece of driftwood and put it in my pocket. As I said goodbye to him before they closed his casket, I slipped it into the casket as a last little gift. Gentle Truth. But I have not forgotten over these last 36 years. Living in accordance with those simple words have kept me close to Our Lord and close to my earthly father and my Heavenly Father.

“If you love me you will keep my commandments.” Jesus said that at the Last Supper as part of his farewell remarks to his disciples. “You will do what I ask you to do.” “You will live as I ask you to live.” “You will keep my commandments.” Why is keeping his commandments so important? Why is doing so a sign of whether we love Him or not? Obeying? Obeying commandments as a sign of love? Well, yes, the Lord asks us to obey but really it is much more than that. If we encounter Jesus, the Risen Jesus, if He begins to become real to us, if His way of living and acting begins to make sense to us and hold meaning for us, enough so that we begin to embrace His way, then we will actually be keeping his commandments. We will actually be imitating Him. We will open ourselves to the love that He has for us.

We know the Ten Commandments. Put God first in your life. Respect Him and His Name. Give to Him alone the worship of your heart. Respect your parents. Respect life, especially human life. Live in the Truth. Be faithful to your word in all areas of your life especially in your marriage. Be honest and straightforward. Learn how to be content with what you have and don't yearn for what the others have. Any of that sound wrong to you? Outdated? Inappropriate? It is just a baseline though. Jesus is at least all these things. But He asks us to love God with everything we have and everything we are. And to love the other, our neighbor, as we love ourselves. Be like Him. Live in life with gentleness and truth. That is what Saint Peter says in the second reading today. Be gentle. Be reverent. Give only good example. Saint Peter says this: SANCTIFY CHRIST AS LORD IN YOUR HEARTS. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Open your heart to the Lord Jesus. Put him first. Live His way. Live in His Truth, Don't substitute your way for his. BY doing that you sanctify Him—even as He sanctifies you.

Philosophers of old reflected and discussed for many years about the fundamental characteristics and attributes of God. They identified four attributes of God. God is One. God is True. God is Good. God is Beautiful. Unity. Truth. Goodness. Beauty. Here is what that means. Any time we come across any of these we are encountering the living God. In Jesus we encounter each of these attributes. Jesus was good and true and Jesus was unifying and beautiful. We would probably better say—attractive--as a person, as a man. So, here is the question. When things come together (unify), when you have an experience of something truly beautiful (or someone), when you hear what you know to be true, when you sense the goodness in a person or a situation, when you do any of these things, is that it? Or do you begin to realize that more is going on? That God is close. That Jesus is near. That God's love is showing itself?

In the gospel today Jesus makes some promises to his disciples. These are some of the last words He will speak on this earth. I can't imagine He is just blowing smoke. Jesus says, if you keep my commandments, I will not leave you orphaned. I will come to you. I will love you. The Father and I will send you our very Spirit. If there is one thing Jesus was, He was True. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Sometimes we want to know where God is with all we are going through in our lives? And all the while the Lord is so close by because so is the Truth. And Goodness, And Beauty, and Unity. In this Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to help us draw closer to Him by increasing our fidelity to the commandments. And ask him to open the eyes of our hearts so that we can recognize his love when He draws near.