

Don't Be a Doubting Thomas—But Believe

I recently heard a story that was so amazing that I had to research to see if it was true or fabricated. But it is true:

In October 1995 Pope John Paul visited Baltimore. While he was there, he insisted on going into the church to visit the Blessed Sacrament. The security guards needed to check out the church and surrounding rooms first, before he could enter. They took trained dogs into the building. These dogs were trained to sniff out guns or people, even those hidden from sight. When they would find something, they were taught to sit and face it. So when it came to the church, the dog sniffed everywhere, then stopped in the Sanctuary and sat, facing the Tabernacle. Then the dog began to whimper and act up, indicating there was something alive in “that gold container.” The guards were confused but insisted the Tabernacle be opened for them to search. They were puzzled until the priest explained to the guard, “This is the living Body and Blood of Jesus!”

So if a dog can sniff out the Real Presence of Jesus—his Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, let no one doubt that we are receiving Christ in the Holy Eucharist! The Eucharist is not just a symbol, but it is the REAL deal: JESUS himself.

Knowing this, let us be ever respectful of his Presence. Let us come to adore him often in Adoration or visit him in the Tabernacle whenever we are in the area. Remember to make the Sign of the Cross when you drive or walk by the church, and acknowledge Christ's presence by saying, “My Lord and my God.”

What Do I Really Need?

Lately the Scriptures I have been reading lead me to ask, what kind of STUFF do I have in my life? Is it STUFF that will lead me to God's kingdom some day, or is it STUFF that will lead me further away? There are many attractions in the world today. Many of them, such as the beauty of nature, can display the Wonder and Awe of God. But, many attractions in the world are also DIStractions from God. The DIStractions often lead us to forget that God is our Father and Creator. Unless we know Him and devote time to Him, we won't truly know who WE are, or for what purpose God created us.

Our invitation today is to block all the STUFF, our DIStractions, from our minds and meditate on the Father, asking ourselves, “For what purpose did God the Father create me? What is God's plan for me? Am I following it?”

We would all rather receive eternal life, than to receive the STUFF this world has to offer. Let us always put God first in our lives. Advent will begin soon. Let's ponder on what STUFF we have in our lives that may be blocking us from growing closer to God. Then decide what to do about it.

Ponder these words from St. John of the Cross:

“Who teaches the soul if not God?

What we need most in order to make progress
is to be silent before this great God
with our appetite and with our tongue,
for the language He best hears is silent love.

Faith is like the feet wherewith the soul journeys to God,
and love is the guide that directs it.”

Settling Conflicts

Ole and Lena had a spat and were giving each other the silent treatment. But when they went to bed, Ole wanted to ask Lena to wake him at 5 am to go to an antique show in the neighboring town. Still not wanting to speak with her, he wrote a note asking her to wake him at 5 am. The next morning he woke up at 9 am. Upset, he saw a note on Lena's pillow that said, “It's 5 am. Time to get up.”

In another joke, a new pastor hit it off on the wrong foot with the Sunday organist. His first sermon was on commitment and service to one another. The organist played the song, “I Shall Not Be Moved.” The next weekend the pastor preached on tithing and the importance of all to give according to their means. The organist responded with the song, “Jesus Paid It All.” The next Sunday the pastor spoke on gossiping and the importance of watching our tongues. The organist responded with the song, “I Love to Tell the Story.” Frustrated, the pastor told the parishioners the next Sunday that he was thinking about leaving for another assignment. The organist responded with the song “O Why Not Tonight?”

We all react differently to conflict. Some of us try to avoid it; some of us use a passive-aggressive approach and some become confrontational. But let us not react like the pastor in this joke and walk away from our problems. For we are called to live in Christian unity. Is that always easy? No! But God gives us the opportunity to work together, despite our differences. It's what we should strive to do in our families, communities, churches, nation and in the world. Pray for those we have conflicts with, and recognize that Jesus calls us to love, despite any disagreements we may have with others in our lives.

The Gift of Touch

I am a person who likes to hug, pat someone on the back, squeeze their hand, etc. Sometimes I forget others are not that way. I was reminded of that recently when I went to shake someone's hand at Mass and they drew their hand away. It is important we respect where others are at.

Hugs were not part of my growing up, but we still knew we were loved. I just think hugs bring a closer bond between people. When a mother or father holds their newborn baby to their chest, certainly that heart-to-heart interaction has an effect on the child AND the parent—a deeper bond being created.

During Covid, touch disappeared from our vocabulary. Visits to the nursing home were banned. But one resident and I found a way to touch. She would press her hand on the inside of the window at the nursing home, while I pressed my hand over hers on the outside of the window. I am surprised how deeply that impacted both of us. Actually so much so, that we continue to do it today when we say our goodbyes (along with our hugs now).

Remember the lady in Scripture that sought to be healed by Jesus? By her faith, she was healed by touching Jesus' garment. I think of that often in church, and will go before the Tabernacle and touch it, knowing it contains our Lord. Then I utter a prayer, “Lord, bring healing to me, as you brought to the lady who touched the tassel of your cloak.”

Let us always remember that even for those who prefer no handshakes, that we are still made One, through the Body of Christ.

What Are We Waiting For?

The signs indicate winter will soon be upon us. The leaves are gone, the gardens bare and the chill is in the air. So how do we prepare for this season? We dig up our flower bulbs, we get our vehicles prepped for winter; we get our furnaces checked or haul in our supply of wood for heating; we dig out our long johns and other winter clothing, put the quilts on our beds, seal our windows and who knows what else.

Jesus tells us in Scripture that people can also read the signs of the sky: "Red sky at night, the day will be bright; and in the morning, Sky red and gloomy, the day will be stormy."

SIGNS. Jesus also says in Scripture, "An evil, faithless age is eager for a sign, but no sign will be given it except that of Jonah." (Mt. 16:1-4)

So what does the sign of Jonah indicate for us? God called Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh to a time of repentance. Nineveh listened; they repented and turned from their evil ways. In doing so, God relented of the punishments He would otherwise cast upon them. Had Nineveh not repented, it may have ended up like Sodom and Gomorrah.

So...why do we pay attention to the signs of the weather and the seasons, but not always pay attention to the signs of Jonah? The signs Jesus gives in Luke 21:8-11 tell us, *Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he' and 'the time is at hand.' Do not follow them. Neither must you be perturbed when you hear of wars and insurrections. These things are bound to happen first, but the end does not follow immediately.* Jesus continued: *'Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, plagues, and famines in various places—and in the sky fearful omens and great signs.'*

Are not many of these signs happening in the world today? Are they enough to call us to repentance? We need not fear, but we do need to prepare, just like we prepare when we see the signs of winter or rain or sunshine coming our way.

The concern can be that we have waited for centuries already for Christ's coming. So many prepare, and when nothing happens, we grow slack in our Faith and turn back to sin. We need to find ways to remain faithful in our wait, even in times of discouragement and temptation. Will Christ return in our lifetime, that of our children or grandchildren, or will it be another millennium? Who knows, but I pray we try to be ready by using the Sacraments, preparing our hearts and seeking lives of virtue. It's not always easy, but I won't give up working at it. Luke continues by saying, "By patient endurance you will save your lives."

As we near the end of this church year, it would be a good time for all of us to assess and ask, "Are we ready if the Lord would call for us today?" If not, what changes do we need to make to accept the call to repentance?

Criticism at its Best

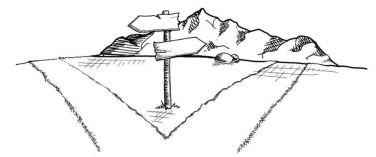
A man and his young son took their donkey to market one day. The man rode the donkey while the son walked. Soon he passed people saying, "Look, that man rides while he makes his son walk." Finally the man got off the donkey and let his son ride. He met more people along the way and heard them saying, "Look, that young and strong boy rides while his father walks." So he made the boy get off the donkey and they both walked. Soon people were saying, "Look, how foolish, the two of them have a donkey and neither of them are riding." So they decided to both get on the donkey. Soon they passed people saying, "My goodness, they treat that poor donkey so poorly with both of them riding him." This made them feel guilty enough that they decided in order to please people they would both carry the donkey themselves. What happened? They never made it to the market.

This story was taken from a homily I heard online. In the homily the priest spoke about how Jesus was criticized when he began his ministry. But, he also spoke about how easy it is to get caught up in negativity and how that can easily grow if we let it. He referred to Catherine the Great who said, "I praise loudly; I blame softly."

Let us ask ourselves, "Do I tend to be negative and judgmental in my thoughts and words—OR can I look at life and what happens around me in a more positive way?" Let that be our thought for the day.

"ATTITUDE IS A CHOICE. HAPPINESS IS A CHOICE. OPTIMISM IS A CHOICE. KINDNESS IS A CHOICE. GIVING IS A CHOICE. RESPECT IS A CHOICE. WHATEVER CHOICE YOU MAKE MAKES YOU. CHOOSE WISELY."

— ROY T. BENNETT



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Pray Always For Our Children

We have probably read about how the Church (but not just the Catholic Church) has many people that have fallen away. I read something recently that has some truth to it: It was called the 4-Generation Fade. It goes like this: 1) Parents don't make church a high priority for their kids; 2) Kids grow up and make it less of a priority for their kids; 3) Those kids grow up and make it no priority for their kids; 4) Those kids grow up with no concept of God.

Although that may often be the case, we also know this does not always hold true. For there are many who raise their children in the Faith, who pray together in your homes and attend Mass regularly, only to find their children not living their Faith today. So often parents are hurt and question what went wrong in their upbringing of their children. There are so many other influences in the world that the devil puts in their way to make them grow lax. But we must continue to pray daily for them, as Saint Monica prayed for her son Augustine, who became a great saint. If they are practicing their Faith, pray they remain vigilant and strong. If they are not practicing their Faith, pray that they will return. That is our duty as parents, no matter how old our children are! Besides praying the Guardian Angel prayer myself each day, I recently added the Guardian Angel prayer for the rest of our family, that goes like this: *Angels of God, Guardians dear to my husband, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to whom God's love commits them here. Ever this day and night be at their sides, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.*

When our children were baptized, we accepted the responsibility to raise them in the Catholic Faith. Let us never cease setting an example for them, praying for them, and praying with them when we can...and then turning it over to God. *God, hold fast to us and all our children.*

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