

# 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 17/18, 2019 – Reflection

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"Though I am afflicted and poor,  
Yet the Lord thinks of me.  
You are my help and deliverer;  
O my God, hold not back!"

From Psalm 40

Song:

School days, school days,  
Dear old Golden Rule days;  
Readin' an' Ritin' an' Rithmetic,  
Taught to the tune of the hickory stick.  
You were my queen in calico,  
I was your bashful barefoot beau.  
You wrote on my slate, "I love you so,"  
When we were a couple o' kids.

All over the country, school kids are returning to the classrooms and the college dorms for another year of learning and investigation, challenge and growth.

In a bygone age, all this schooling, all these areas of study were summed up with three little letters: the Three R's ... Readin'; Ritin'; and Rithmetic ... and that I think all those words begin with "R" shows you just how well my education went!!

But I think all of us could advance our educational quotient by adding one more "R" to those Three R's: Readin'; Ritin'; Rithmetic; ... Respect. Our society, our social media driven dealings with one another, have become so poisoned with dismissal, criticism, derisiveness, demonization, put-downs, venom, and self-serving lies as to tear people apart, unravel the fabric of Church and community, and threaten to raise the levels of hatred and violence because people cannot see the value of other people, because people can only accept their "kind", can only tolerate their views, can only understand those who mirror their race, their politics, their creed. And all of that is not any kind of sign that we have progressed in wisdom and intelligence but only that we have reverted to primitive ignorance.

I make progress in any field of endeavor: from sports to academics, from politics to international relations, from faith to family dynamics by accepting the other as worthy, as having dignity, as gifted even in small ways, as another creature of God. All of that adds up to Respect ... and Respect is the foundation for development, for problem-solving, for fruitful relationship, for faith, for harmony. If you constantly kick a dog for making a mess, you'll probably get the dog to fear you, cower before you, even stop messing, but you'll never really teach the dog and

you'll never have a real companion, only a shaking, gun-shy, shell that never becomes the great, happy, loyal friend it could have been with just an ounce of TLC.

I'd like to leave you with a story to show you what I'm trying to say. Every level of schooling can be competitive and challenging. From grade school through secondary, college and graduate and professional schools, we are asked to absorb new material, learn new skills, be tested on proficiency, and judged on achievement and ability. When I was in graduate school preparing for the vocation that I live now and felt called to since I was little, I had to take courses in public speaking. I remember one professor I had ... her name was Dr. McPherson. As our first assignment in her class, she asked us to prepare a reading from scripture to proclaim in front of the whole group at the next session. As I sat and listened to the various readers, some did a wonderful job while others didn't seem to have the ability to make the reading come alive and move the audience. In any case, I was struck by the way Dr. McPherson offered her critiques in a kind and forceful manner though always tempered with a compliment to give hope, something to build on. Well, came my turn and I remember doing a reading from the Gospel of John, the story of the raising of Lazarus. When I was finished, Dr. McPherson thanked me for my effort and proceeded to tell me I had a glottal fry, a sybillant "S", and a nasal tonality. Just as I was ready to melt into the floor in failure and defeat, the professor paused, removed her glasses, wiped at her eyes, and said, "Other than that, that was probably the most beautiful reading I have ever heard."

I've never forgotten what she said. It gave me hope. It gave me confidence. It inspired me to try. I wanted to be good at something

and not just punch it in. She gave me Respect and because of that, I wanted to learn the other lessons she was willing to teach.

School's back in session. Be careful of one another. Show a little Respect and just watch how someone can blossom.