

My Dear People of God,

I write this about an hour after returning from a week of retreat at the Nazareth Retreat Center in Kentucky. The retreat center is run by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and sits on a huge piece of property covering hundreds of acres and also serves as their Mother House as well as retirement home. The expansive grounds and landscape provide a wonderful environment for prayer and reflection. There are about one hundred sisters on the property. One of the highlights of my time was to visit with them at dinner time and to hear their stories. Most of them are in their 80's and 90's and have touched many lives for the glory of God.

I spent the first three days on a self guided retreat looking back at the last year of my life and ministry, considering the present and seeking direction for the future. It was a very fruitful exercise. Then I spent the remaining time in a formal directed retreat focused on 'Contemplative Prayer.' It was a very fruitful spiritual experience and I am grateful to God for the graces I received and to you for your prayers for me.

This Sunday's gospel reminds us about the greatest commandment which is Love. The scribe asked Jesus which of the commandments was the greatest. In response, Jesus gave two: the first commandment He said is to love God and the second is to love our neighbor. These two are not separate but are rather related in that our love of God manifests in our love for our neighbor. In other words, our relationship with God, must manifest in our relationship with others. The way we treat others manifests our relationship with God. A good question for us to ponder this weekend and the coming week is: ***Does the way a treat or deal with others, manifest that I have a relationship with God?*** Let me illustrate this with a fictional story about a cat and rat (mouse).

One of the most sacred things a Moslem is asked to do in the lifetime is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, the birthplace of the prophet Mohammed. It is one of the five pillars of Islam. Now here goes the story: Once upon a time, the king of the cats made a pilgrimage to Mecca to the surprise of the rats/mice. On his return from the pilgrimage, the king of the rats/mice felt obliged to go and congratulate the king of cats. But when the other rats/mice heard this, they feared for their king's safety and so tried to discourage him saying: *'the cat is our enemy, he can't be trusted.'* The king rat/mouse responded: *"Oh no, now he has been to Mecca, I expect to see a great change in him. I am told he now even prays five times a day!"*

So the king mouse/rat set out. On coming into the kingdom of the cats he spotted the king cat in a distance and was very impressed to see that he was still dressed in his pilgrim's robe and was deep in prayer. And so the king rat/mouse gently approached his presence. No sooner had the king mouse come near the king cat, than he jumped up and pounced! Fortunately, the king rat/mouse was a fast mover (*that's one of the reasons he was elected king*), and so succeeded in escaping down a hole. Upon return to the other rats/mice, they asked him: *"How did it go?"* He replied, I am afraid, you were right in warning me. Though he prays like a pilgrim, he still pounces like a cat!

My dear brothers and sisters, isn't that many times our own story? That we make the pilgrimage

every Sunday to encounter God and remain the same!. At the end of their conversation, Jesus said to the scribe who asked the question about the commandment: "*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*" In saying this, Jesus was conveying the point that; knowing which are the two most important commandments was only the first step. Putting them into practice was the second step. All of us know the commandment to LOVE, all we now need is second step and then we are in the kingdom.

This past Thursday we celebrated All Saints days, where we honored those who made the second step and prayed for their intercession. We continue to pray their intercession. This month of November let us also remember and pray for all our deceased relatives and friends as we strive to live the commandment to love.

Thanks and God bless

Fr. Simon Peter