

Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

***“This young’s man blindness is not the result of the sins of his parents.
Rather, the result of his blindness will be the glory of God.”***

A new film, *The 15:17 to Paris* by the legendary director, Clint Eastwood, is not your typical action movie.

The actors are not Hollywood celebrities.
The dialogue is plain as dirt.
And the action lasts only a couple of minutes.

It’ not much of an action film.
And it hasn’t made Clint Eastwood much money.

But what is has done is this:
It shows us how God accomplishes amazing things
through ordinary people
who dare to do amazing things.

Here’s the backstory:

In 2015, three American friends
—one of them a college student, the other two, off-duty soldiers—
subdued a terrorist on a train from Amsterdam to Paris.
One of the Americans was stabbed in the neck three times.
In all, four people were injured. but no one was killed.

The fight on the train is an incredibly tense and well-executed scene,
but the majority of the film is about the ordinary lives
of these ordinary men.

Early in the movie, one of the young is shown on his knees,
praying at the side of his bed,
the prayer of St. Francis:
*Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith...*

Just three guys who stay in touch,
save up some money and take a trip to Europe.

Tourist stops.

German beer.

Corny jokes and selfies.

You won't find much action in *The 15:17 to Paris*.
But you find a lot of truth.

The truth about how ordinary people
sometimes stumble into the exact place
where they're meant to be...
then rise to occasion.

At last week's homily reflection group,
our teenagers spoke about the kind of heroes they admire:

First Responders

Police Officers

Doctors and nurses...

people who stand ready to give all they have to give,
sometimes placing their very lives at risk
to assist and save complete strangers.

Like those three Americans on that train from Amsterdam to Paris.
who found themselves in that precise train car
at that precise time
and, on the spur of the moment, did what they needed to do.

And, in doing so, brought glory to God,
which is just another way of saying,
they brought a smile to God's face!

That's what happened in today's gospel

"Isn't this the blind man who used to sit and beg at the gate?"

That's the first shot we get of the guy at the beginning of the gospel.

Then, in no time, we see him
standing up in the synagogue
standing up for himself...
standing tall,
Speaking his mind
and speaking the truth!

And the reason he does so,
the very reason he is able to do so,
is because,
at the right place, at the right time,
he placed his life in the hands of Christ.

When was the last time you did a similar thing?

Maybe it was as simple as hugging a child in your kindergarten classroom,
knowing it would likely be the only embrace that child would receive that day.

Making a stranger in town working a turn-around
feel welcome in Borger.
Then, going one step further—one step further for Christ—and inviting them
to join you at Sunday Mass.

Maybe it was simply getting up a half-hour earlier one morning last week
to sit in silence, opening your Bible, then opening your heart
to hear what the Lord has been longing to communicate to you
for a long time.

Do you remember the incident in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican,
when a pilgrim handed the pope a cage with two white doves inside?

The woman asked Francis to set them loose.
The pope reached inside the cage,
grabbed the first one,
which he then tossed into the air with a smile on his face.

But the second dove proved more difficult.
It was afraid and tightly clutched the pope's fingers

with its small feet before finally took off
and circled above the crowd.

Like the young man in today's gospel,
like that second dove in the hand of Pope Francis,
we sometimes hesitate...

but how wonderful it is,

what joy it brings to God

when we speak the truth,

when we act with courage,

when we spread our wings

and let our hearts fly free from the cage of fear...

as we soar upward, before the face—the smiling face—of God!