

Homily for Sunday Mass
February 7, 2019
Year C 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 6:17, 20-26
----Father Michael Grant George Cadotte----

Truth of the matter is, each of us in this sacred and special gathering place, our collective home where all are welcomed, has experienced one of the conditions Luke lays out for us as what Jesus deemed to be blessed. Poor, hungry, sad (weeping-spiritually crushed), hated, excluded, insulted or marked as less than, as evil. And when we have felt any of these emotions to hear the comforting words of our Savior, "Behold, your reward will be great in heaven." (LK 6:23) can be of great joy.

The other truth, however, is that for every time I felt one of those emotions, I most likely had untold situations where I lived and experienced the inverse of them. When I have a car, some money, nice things, a job, a full stomach, a smile on my face, people who love me and to whom I love – and that includes all of you. I do not like to think on these in today's ready as Jesus then says to me, "Woe to you..." (LK 6:26)!

I started my morning, yesterday in downtown Grand Rapids and while walking around with a friend after breakfast an elderly man approached and asked for a dollar. My friend was ahead of me and waved him off and I, how often do not engage so as not to support various addictions and whatnot, just felt the need, the call, to give. I reached into my wallet and handed the man my last dollar. My friend said, "why did you do that? I just encourages them, and a day does not go by that I have no less than eight asking and often aggressively and with anger when you don't give." Maybe the call was less of a man who wanted a dollar and more of a need to be seen, to be a human in kinship with another human. The other fact in that exchange was that man walked away with money and I departed with none – hmmm. Maybe my loss of a little gave that man the world and in so doing, maybe, that also inched me a bit closer to living the Gospels and being a Christian in action and not in word.

I am also reminded today of a story of my cousin Timmy. Tim is about 15 years older than me and is this tall, loud red-neck trucker of a guy that drinks, a lot, and is quick to say what is on his mind regardless of the company around him or how others will receive it. He never graduated high school and is far from learned. Well one day my father was contacted by a local Native American tribe about the very large teepee he had in his yard – more of a lodge that would seat dozens. They asked if they could use it for a ceremony and my dad, Chief Full of Bull as we often call him, was on cloud nine to host such an event. The day came and the event was had, and the leader invited my father into the teepee for fellowship when, all of a sudden there was pounding all around the heavy canvas of the 40-foot-high teepee. You see cousin Timmy was running around the exterior hitting the teepee and yelling, "Hey Unck. What are ya doin in there? Indian crap?" And just as he said those last words, he opened the flap and look in at two dozen Native Americans in full native dress, and my dad, looking back at him. "Oh shoot," he said, closed the flap, and ran off.

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It would be easy for some to dismiss my cousin as a bum, someone who is always finding trouble and often creating it, a drunk at times, and of low education. The reality is, my cousin has a deep sense of family and would do anything to help someone. His love knows no limits and that fact he has only one kidney is just one example of that love as the other he gave his sister to try to save her life.

Both of those stories remind me of the words of Fr. Gregory Boyle who said, "...The measure of our compassion lies not in our service of those on the margins, but only in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them."

Fr. Greg, you see, has been living the teachings of Jesus for decades now in Los Angeles in ministry to gang members. His efforts have led to a \$15M+ enterprise of love called Homeboy Industries. Homeboy has all sorts of services, programs, and jobs to not only supply basic needs (money for food, clothing, and shelter) but gives dignity, hope, acceptance, and love to men and women (or what Fr. Greg happily calls his Homies) as humans, equal and loved by God. You can find a video speech that is quite inspirational of Fr. Greg on my personal Facebook page if interested.

But you see, I feel that when life is going strong and we are flying high, we have this bad habit of accepting that as our just reward. Feeling that, "It's about time." And view it as the fruit of OUR hard labor and not as fruit from God. We all too often turn away from God in the high times and run to God in the low times. Most of us have a fairly happy life and this could surely give us a clue to where your God-centered focus is most of the time.

In reality, God created all of us to be together in one great circle of existence in love. Sadly, many live outside of circle in our physical world and Fr. Greg's view of life is a, "...circle of compassion with nobody standing outside of it." He pleads with all who will hear him, in speech after speech, to go to those margins and stand with those whose dignity has been denied. To stand with the demonized and disposable. To stand with those whose burdens are more than they can bare. To stand with the poor, the powerless, and the voiceless, "...so the day will come when we stop throwing people away."

Well, does it make a difference? You tell me. At Homeboy they have provided 32,451 educational sessions, 3, 670 therapy sessions and conducted over 11,834 tattoo removal sessions in 2017 alone! And the number of lives saved in turning people back to God and not killing each other and the innocent collateral damage is most likely too immense to even calculate.

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This all started with an act of service that saw those being served as equal people in need of a little help and a whole lot of compassion. It started when people of good will lowered themselves to allow them, and others, to be raised up. It started when the good life was not seen as a given and we strived to give it to everyone through our actions, our love, our compassion, our sense of right and morality, and our precious time.

“God is proof that only the soul that ventilates the world with tenderness has any chance of changing the world. [So] go out to the margins, because that is the only way they will get erased” (Fr. Gregory Boyle).

AMEN