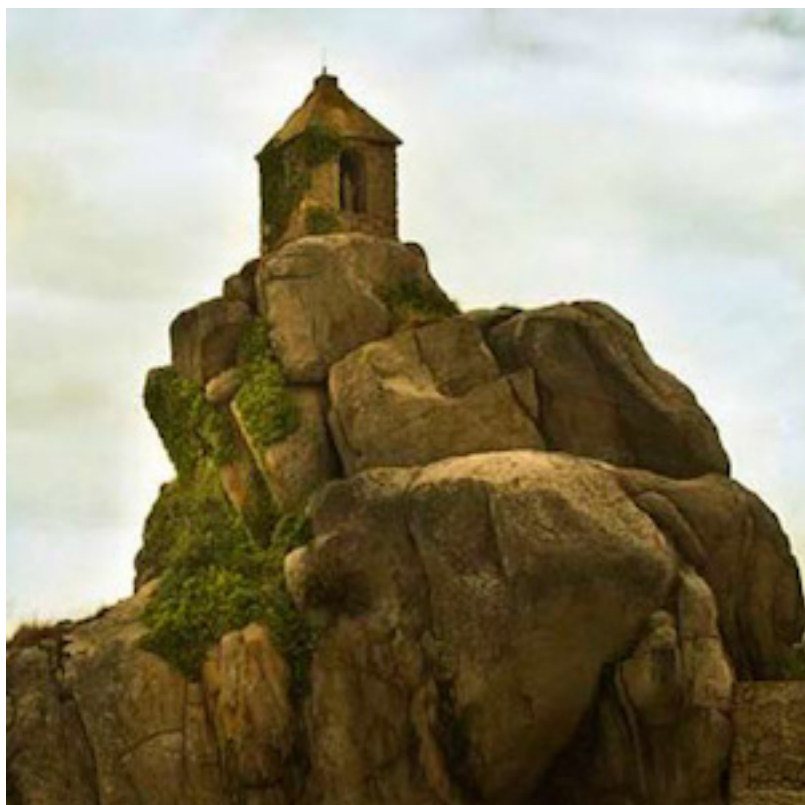


Commentary to the 23 Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)



Jesus ultimately requires all, but he accepts our stumbling steps. Since returning from World Youth Day I have been giving a mini series on Youth Challenges. Before giving this fourth and final homily I would like to summarize the main points. First, the Cross: Shared suffering, if borne patiently, can unite us with others and with God. The Cross saves us. Second, the Narrow Gate: Self-superiority (looking down on others), the paralysis of shame and fear of judgment prevent us from entering the Narrow Gate. Our situation seems hopeless but there is a way: Jesus! He himself is the Narrow Gate. Do not be afraid. Open the door to Christ. Third, Humility. Humility opens the door. Pope Francis gives three steps to humility: forgiving oneself, making peace in the family and practicing courtesy.

The Cross, the Narrow Gate, Humility. I think you now want to know the cost. Jesus tells us to "calculate the cost." What's the price tag? The bottom line, Pope Francis tells us, is love. But not just any love. Pope Francis says, "A person who cannot choose to love for ever can hardly love for even a single day." We know in our bones he is telling us the truth: "A person who cannot choose to love for ever can hardly love for even a single day." Love is not for a day. It's not like giving a tip at a restaurant. Love gives all. As Jesus says, "Any of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." This weekend we have a powerful example of giving all. I think you know who I mean. Pope Francis will canonize her: Mother Teresa. St. Teresa of Calcutta! Once she was cleansing the wounds of a dying man.

A journalist kept his distance because of the stench. "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars," he said. Mother Teresa replied, "Neither would I." The love of Christ motivated St. Teresa's total self-giving:

Not only in caring for the dying, but the dying to self involved in leading a congregation of sisters, the dying to self of being in the public eye 24/7, the dying to self serving in a church of very imperfect men - and I use the word "men" intentionally. We priests brought her plenty of grief, but she manifestly loved us. In 1984 I had the blessing of attending a retreat where she spoke to us very frankly: a slight woman - like a small fragile bird - but powerful because of her total self-giving love. You might protest. "I'm no Mother Teresa! I'm no saint!" Neither am I.

I take comfort from Pope Francis' words about mercy. He warns against putting so many conditions on mercy we empty it of its meaning. "That's the worst way of watering down the Gospel," he says. Mercy is mercy. It doesn't exclude justice and truth but as Pope Francis says, "Mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God's truth." For sure Jesus ultimately requires all, but he accepts our stumbling steps. Those steps with God's grace can lead to choosing love for ever. To conclude this series on youth challenges hear these words of encouragement: "Every morning, on rising," says Pope Francis, "we reaffirm before God our decision to be faithful, come what may in the course of the day. And all of us, before going to sleep, hope to wake up and continue this adventure, trusting in the Lord's help." Amen.

Fr Phil Bloom