

Retirement Weekend  
07/01/18

It seems a certain priest was called out late one night to go on a sick call. On his way, he had to pass the local pub and as he looked in the window, he saw some of his parishioners still sitting at the bar. He felt it was his obligation to chastise them about being out so late.

He walked to the door and called out to the first one: "Sullivan, do you want to go to heaven?" Sullivan answered "yes Father." So the priest said "well, get off that barstool and get over here." And Sullivan obediently came to where the priest told him. Then he called to the next one: "Kelly, do you want to go to heaven?" Kelly answered "yes Father", to which the priest responded "Well, you get over here too."

Then the priest called out to Murphy: "Murphy, do you want to go to heaven?", to which Murphy replied "Indeed I do, Father." The priest then said, "Well, then get away from that bar and come over here." Murphy then said: "No, I'm not going to do that!" The priest said: "Murphy, don't you want to go to heaven when you die?" Murphy said, "oh yes, Father, when I die, but I thought you were getting ready to go right now."

I wanted to be sure to include some humor in the midst of the sadness present in this church. As we got closer and closer to this weekend, the reality started to set in about what I was leaving behind at this wonderful community. So many of you have said to me over the last few weeks that you're not sure what you will do without me. Well, let me assure you, you'll do just fine. In one of my meditation books last week, I came across the following: let go of what is in order to welcome what can be. I believe that phrase is especially important to keep in mind any time there is change. Let go of what is in order to welcome what can be

Today's Gospel focuses on two women and the power of touch in each one's life. As Ted Wolgamot says, God, in Jesus, hears the cry of pain and is touched by human anguish. All those in

today's Gospel story discovered that the God we believe in through Jesus is a God who can be experienced in real life – right now.

He goes on to provide a few examples: in that Church in Charleston, South Carolina where so many were gunned down during a Bible study of all things; in the everyday wonders of parenting; in the healing that happens in medical centers; in the birthing of children, or in the celebrations of life-long marriages; in the recovery of addicts, in the raising to new life of people imprisoned, in the imparting of forgiveness to people who have harmed us.

18 years ago, at my Mass of Thanksgiving on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000, I spoke of how our lives are linked together and used a reflection from my favorite author, Frederick Buechner, to support the idea. He likens the linking to a giant spider web. He says the lives we touch for good or ill will touch other lives and those in turn others, and so on and so on, until who knows how big the web becomes. We are not islands unto ourselves.

As I look back on my 18 years as a priest and my 8 years as your pastor, I cannot help but be overwhelmed with a deep, deep sense of gratitude. I've celebrated sacraments with many of you here today. I've done weddings for you or your children. I've buried some of your parents, some of your siblings, some of your spouses and yes, sadly, I've also had to bury some of your children. But through it all, God has been right there with us, with you and me, giving me the right things to say and in many cases, giving you the strength to persevere.

A little over 11 years ago, I came across the following meditation, called *The Best Day of My Life*. In part, it goes like this: Today, when I awoke, I suddenly realized that this is the best day of my life, ever. There were times when I wondered if I would make it to today, but I did. And because I did, I'm going to celebrate.

Today, I'm going to celebrate what an unbelievable life I've had so far: the accomplishments, the many blessings, and, yes, even the hardships because they have served to make me stronger. I will go through this day with my head held high and a happy heart. I will marvel at God's seemingly simple gifts: the morning dew, the sun, the clouds, the trees, the flowers, the birds.

Today, I will share my excitement for life with other people. I'll make someone smile. I'll tell someone I love just how deeply I care for them and how much they mean to me. And tonight, before I go to bed, I'll go outside and raise my eyes to the heavens. I will stand in awe at the beauty of the stars and the moon, and I will praise God for these magnificent treasures. So ends the meditation but I would add that I will praise God for the magnificent treasures seated right in front me.

In my column this weekend, I use part of a reflection about planting of seeds. Though you will not receive a packet of seeds as you leave today, I hope and pray I have planted the seeds of comfort and good will in each and every one of you during my time here at St. Pat's. If for some reason I offended you, I sincerely apologize - it was not intentional. If I have brought you joy, then do as Buechner suggests: spread that joy to others; get that spider web a bouncing. For it is in the spreading of joy that we spread the kingdom right here on earth. May God continue to bless each and every one of us each and every day.