

One would think that in a small parish with few families, we should have fewer of what I am calling in this homily (for reasons made clear below) “interruptions”, but I find that this is not the case. As I young man, I didn’t think that life was all that hard. And now as a not-so-young man, I realize that life is very hard. It is complex and difficult to navigate emotionally and mentally. It’s a mess really. Thanks for that, Adam and Eve. Yet for all of this, God loves us, having suffered for us, and bearing with us in the suffering He calls us to endure.

In today’s lesson from St. Luke, chapter 18, we see Jesus gathering the twelve disciples together to begin His final journey to Jerusalem to accomplish our redemption through suffering, dying, and rising again from the grave. The disciples were confused – they could not imagine that Jesus would actually die. This was the man who walked on water and commanded the oceans. This was the man who cast out demons and who gave them power to cast out demons too. This was the man who healed all diseases and taught that the kingdom of God was at hand. This was just the beginning of His ministry, and they had big things planned. So what Jesus was saying seemed absurd to them. “And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.”

Regardless, they continued on, following Christ to Jerusalem. As they went, a larger company joined them. Many pilgrims were headed to the city to celebrate the Passover. And as this joyous company passed by Jericho, a blind beggar began to call out. The lesson reads, “Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.” It always strikes me as peculiar that the main narrative is interrupted by this blind man. We want to get on with the story of Jesus’ journey toward the redemption he was to work for all of humanity. Was not this the task for which He was born, for which the eternal second person of the Trinity became incarnate as one of us? The journey to Bethlehem was what was important, not this blind beggar on the side of the road. The fate of the cosmos hinged upon the journey of Jesus. Yet Jesus did not ignore the blind man’s pleas. He allowed Himself to be interrupted. The redemption of all creation could wait for a few minutes more.

If you are anything like me, you do not like interruptions. But here, Jesus stopped and

gave His complete attention to the blind man. And this miracle wasn't rushed, either. Jesus took His time with the man. He asked him a question and listened to the answer. He talked with him. He regarded him as a person without condescension. And then Christ restored this poor beggar's sight, and the beggar responded by joining the train of people who were following Jesus and by glorifying God. Such a salvation demanded no less than this joyous response.

Now compare Jesus' actions to those of the disciples. Notice they were so set upon their plans, that they could not give Jesus the regard, the belief, that He, of all people, deserved. They had an agenda, and they could not imagine that agenda being displaced – not even by God's plan for redeeming a fallen world. So in this passage the disciples give us a picture ... of ourselves, as we are; Christ gives us a picture of what we should be.

We have here in this lesson a demonstration of the love that we, the followers of Jesus, must nurture in our lives; love like that of Jesus who regards every person. Do not love like the disciples who regarded their own ambitions. The love Jesus showed is the love that St. Paul famously described in 1 Corinthians 13. It is a love that tolerates interruptions on all scales. Sometimes we encounter large-scale and life-changing interruptions. Many of you will know what I mean. We all have some sort of life-plan in mind, and it usually goes something like this: "Finish high school, finish college, get a career, get married, have two or three kids and one or two dogs, live happily ever after." Often though, somewhere between the start of college and the career or marriage, God interrupts us. Perhaps we thought that we would be making big money in some high-powered career, but then we fell in love with someone who didn't want to move for the career's sake. Or we thought that we would get married pretty quickly, but never found that person that we could share our lives with. We knew exactly what kind of work we wanted to do, but perhaps God instead called us into ministry. Maybe we contract a major disease. Whatever it was, we have a head-on collision with real life. God allows this confrontation, and our priorities suddenly shift; our plan, our vision of what happiness is, is interrupted. How do we – or should I say, how *did* we - respond to this interruption? With peace and contentment, or with angst and resentment?

But what then also of the small scale interruptions? Time is a precious thing, and when we are working on a project, when we have limited time available for the project, interruption mean that our project gets put on hold. We don't like this. We might refuse to be in-

errupted and ignore helping that other person. Or perhaps we might help them, but do so begrudgingly. We might try to pawn off the request to someone else... "delegating" we may call it. All of these responses communicate to that other person that he or she is not that important. These actions do *not* communicate love.

Now this wouldn't be an issue if we were not called to love as Christ loves, if we weren't called to exhibit the love described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Love is patient, love bears all things, and love endures all things, even interruptions. And a quick word about the word "charity." The King James Bible uses the word "charity" while our modern translations use the word "love." Each of these words in modern English carries a slightly different connotation from what St. Paul intends by the Greek word used here. That word is *agape*, and it is defined very much by this passage. To summarize, we could say that *agape* is a forgetting about oneself in order to serve another. This is the highest Christian ideal, virtue, and Christ is the epitome of this virtue. Our goal in this life is to become like Christ in His trust of the Father and in His embodiment of *agape*.

However, the problem we encounter in becoming more like Christ, is that those interruptions in our lives can be very hard. They push us to the very brink. Let me repeat this for emphasis because platitudes will not do. Those interruptions, particularly the large ones, are very hard and painful. We pray that things would not turn out in a certain way, and it seems that God just doesn't hear our prayers. Instead He asks us to trust Him. He's got this, and even though we can't see it, those interruptions are God's love to us. Hard love, yes. Tough love, yes. But love nonetheless.

One of the primary purposes of such interruptions is to teach us to love and trust God more. Most of the time, it is easy for us to say that God is good with our mouths, but what do we really feel? It is hard to know that He is good, in our minds and in our hearts, when we are hurting, when we are in free fall. We don't want Him to interrupt our plans. But the only way that we can develop the depth of love and trust that He wants us to develop, is through

these trials. Deep formation in holiness only comes through God's interruptions in our lives.

And in these interruptions, we are called upon to respond to God like Christ responded to the blind beggar, not like the disciples responded to Christ. We are to stop and take notice of the one who is interrupting us. We are to give them our attention. We are to regard them. Sometimes these interruptions in our lives do not originate from another person, but they are, as it seems, acts of God. We lose our job or we lose our vehicle or we suffer an illness or ... well you name it. So many things can be taken away in a moment. A lot can happen in a day, let alone in a year.

In the midst of such turmoil, our hearts naturally respond with irritation or grief or anger or sadness. Each one of us is unique in this way, but these are all responses to what God has allowed in our lives. These are responses to God, and the initial sharpness of our emotions will eventually give way to a lingering version of them. The implicit questions that are then posed to us are, "Do you love God? Do you believe that He loves you? Will you trust God even now? Will you submit to what God has allowed in your life or will you continue in that lingering anger or sadness or other persistent emotion?"

And this is really the core issue. Will we submit to the love of God even when that love hurts? In Christ, we are expected to grow in our ability to love as God loves. We are to grow in that 1 Corinthians 13 *agape*. And God will do what He must do in our lives to bring us there. It may take a long time for us to finally come around. We may have resistant hearts – it is not as easy as just saying, "I submit to the love of God." Being aware of our emotions and submitting to God in our thoughts may help during a healing process, but our hearts will submit only when they are ready. Be patient with yourselves, for love is patient and therefore God is the most patient of all.

Finally, let us remember that Lent is upon us. The Church sets this time aside every year for its people to do some spiritual housecleaning. We are called upon to make this a holy Lent by self-examination, by asking God to forgive us our sins and to reveal our failing to us, so that we may be focused in our prayers and disciplines. Let us long to grow in imagining Christ, so that the kingdom of God would be revealed through us to the world. Maybe some of us need to grow in trusting God and submitting to Him through the interruptions of

life. No doubt that all of us can find some area in our souls that needs attention so let us embrace a discipline of prayer and fasting.

But let us not forget that we only sow. It is God who brings the increase. And also remember that all of these things are nothing worth if we do them out of anything but the love of God. Spiritual disciplines are not means of currying favor with God. They are tools, not goals. The goal is to grow in the love and service of God, even in the face of the interruptions that God and man bring our way. This is our prayer: that we would love God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit which resides within us. And in loving God more, may we also grow in love for each other.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. AMEN.