

Homily

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 4, 2018

It's February already. Winter is half over and we are already in the 2nd month of the New Year.

Show of hands; how many of us made New Year's resolutions? Keep them up if you can; how many remember what those were? How many have kept them so far?

A few of the top New Year's resolutions, in no particular order, are:

Get out of debt

Exercise

Eat healthier

These are each noble goals. And, as we all know, there are many other noble goals we can set for ourselves.

We all sincerely want to be better people; we want to become the best we can be for our spouse, our children, our parents, ourselves. And we want to be better for God. We know it's the right thing to do.

We also have Ash Wednesday coming up soon; just ten days away. Another chance to better ourselves. Lent is an opportunity to die to self; to sacrifice so we can be more open to God's grace, mercy and love for us. The Code of Canon Law states that, "the divine law binds all the Christian faithful to do penance each in his or her own way." (CCC 1249)

And the Church prescribes certain times for us to devote ourselves in this special way, including the season of Lent.

New Year's resolutions, Lenten Sacrifice, or any other of many self-imposed challenges is what we do to make ourselves better people, better Christians.

Rita Antoinette Rizzo was born April 20, 1923 in Canton, Ohio, in a community immigrant mill workers. Her father abandoned the family when Rita was only 5 years old. Being an only child, she and her mother struggled in an era of economic strife and in a culture of social stigma.

She never dated because of her experience with her parents. She didn't have any friends because she was afraid it would take time away from her mother.

She suffered from a stomach ailment that caused severe abdominal pain until directed to complete a nine-day novena. On the ninth day, the pain went away as did the lump that caused the pain. She dedicated her life to God and entered the cloistered life where she finally felt at home. She was 21 years old.

Two years later, she was involved in an accident that resulted in a spinal injury requiring her to wear leg braces for most of her life.

In 1981, after many years of various efforts in public speaking and broadcast media, she formed her own non-profit media corporation, EWTN – The Eternal Word Television Network.

At her vesting as a Poor Claire nun she became Sister Mary Angelica of the Annunciation. Today, we know her as Mother Angelica.

In the year 2000, she suffered her first of several strokes which affected her speech. As her health deteriorated, she eventually lost her ability to speak altogether. She entered eternal life on Easter Sunday, 2016.

Mother Angelica is a great example of perseverance in the face of tragedy. She was very opinionated, but mostly of a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus.

About her afflictions, she said, "We don't understand the awesomeness of living even one more day... I told my sisters, 'When I get really bad, give me all the medicine I can take, all the tubes you can stuff down me. I want to live. Because I will have suffered one more day for the love of God. But most of all I will know God better. You cannot measure the value of one new thought about God in your own life.'"

How many of us are sick right now? How many just got over being sick. It has been said that we're all either going into a crisis, in the middle of a crisis, or coming out of a crisis. That's the way it feels sometimes. Job said in the first reading today, "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?"

All of us have a choice. When things happen, we can choose to dwell on the suffering, blame someone or something, do nothing about it.

Or, we can choose to move on, push through, persevere. This means we continue to praise God, raise each other up, support each other as the family of God.

We all have our crosses to bear. We can choose to let it weigh us down or lift it up and carry it stubbornly, like Mother Angelica. Or when the sacrifices we make in our New Year's resolutions or during Lent becomes too difficult, we can quit or muster the strength to continue.

We know Christ is the answer. We know Christ is present, in both the Word and Sacrament. Yet every day we struggle with the drudgeries of life.

God chose us. Each of us is called to be with God. Even when we fail; especially when we fail. God calls us, loves us, cares for us, protects us, and yes, sometimes even challenges us.

Remember Job was called to suffer. God wasn't challenging Job's faith in God, God was challenging Job's faith in Job. God wanted Job to know for himself that he, Job, was faithful, even when put to the test.

God already knew it, just as God knows each of us has the ability to meet whatever challenges face us. In all cases, God gives us the grace and strength to meet the challenge, and most of all God loves us, even if, even when we fail to meet the challenge. And if we do meet the challenge, that's great; there will always be another challenge around the corner. That's the drudgery of life.

And through it all, God's love comforts us, strengthens us, encourages us, if we let Him. This is key: WE have to let God's love in; He won't push it down our throats. WE have to be open to God's love. Don't push it away. And if we reject God's love, that's okay. God's love will still be there tomorrow, waiting patiently for us to figure it out.

Jesus said in today's Gospel, "For this purpose I have come."

This was His drudgery. Not that He complained, because, as He said, "For this purpose I have come." His job, if you will allow me, was to heal, drive out demons and preach the Good News.

We all have our own drudgeries in our lives. Yet, there is Good News.

So stay the course, persevere, keep struggling.

Keep coming to Christ who gives us strength.

Keep listening to His Word; in His Word, we hear the Good News.

Keep feeding on His Body; it is here we receive nourishment, the food of everlasting life.

Keep coming to His Sacrament of Reconciliation for healing; we need to stay close to God and repair the separation we cause in our sin.

Keep struggling with the drudgeries of life so that we all can eventually hear those glorious words,

"Well done, good and faithful servant."