

Homily

5th Sunday of Lent, March 18, 2018

1982 was a tough year for our track team. Three of us suffered significant injuries you would normally associate with football or wrestling. One of the staff was collecting the high jump and pole vault mats on the back of a pickup truck. He was on the wrong side of the truck when the mats slide off and fell on top of him. He broke his collar bone.

Another was a high jumper. He didn't realize it until the accident that he had a slight stress fracture just below his knee. He participated in sports year round and hadn't really rested in more than five years. While approaching the high jump bar, his leg gave out under the stress and broke.

Me? I was too lazy to go around a fence so I jumped it, caught my foot on top, fell over, landed on my hand and broke my arm. We three were featured in the year book with the caption, "Tough Year for Track."

I went to the doctor. Yes, the X-ray showed a fracture between my wrist and elbow. He had to set the break before putting my arm in a cast. I was not looking forward to him setting my arm. I knew it was going to hurt. And it did. At one point, while the doctor was struggling and pressing and pushing, I heard a snap.

Relieved, I asked him if that was my arm setting back in place. No, he said, that was his finger. It took a while and hurt a lot before he finally reset my broken arm.

In the end, I was glad that he reset the bone in my arm. If he hadn't, it would not have healed properly.

How often do we struggle to do what we know will be painful, or at least uncomfortable, knowing the end result will be better?

Mothers can relate to this very well. We only have new life, after the pain of childbirth.

We can only become stronger physically, after we tear ourselves down such as a body builder or a distance runner, with rigorous efforts like lifting lots of weights and running many, many miles.

We have heard throughout this season of Lent Jesus talking about two extremes; light and dark, good and evil, above and below, and today about life and death. The grain of wheat must die in order to produce much fruit, but if it doesn't die, if it lives, it remains just a grain of wheat.

He continues with His own struggle about life and death; should He ask His father to save Him? No, for this is the reason He came. Jesus, like you and me, wants to live. He wants to remain with His family and friends. He wants to stay and avoid what was coming.

But He knows that the only way to save us all is to die for us all. In dying, He defeats death. We, in dying to our own sinfulness, are born into eternal life.

And this is a daily effort on our part. Every day, when we refuse to listen to gossip or we turn our heads when temptation enters our field of vision, we die a little more to our earthly self. When we pray in the morning for our family, our friends and our neighbors, we die to self. When we strive to be more like Christ, to be in the light, to look to what is above, to do and say what is good and kind and supportive, we are storing up life in heaven.

Every day we have the opportunity to embrace Christ a little more. We can attend Mass a little more often; we can pray a Rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet. We can spend a little more time with our loved ones.

We have the example of the perfect life, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Beacon of Hope, to lead us in the right direction.

Today, we can listen more intently to the words of the Consecration father is about to pray on our behalf. Today, we can receive Jesus a little more reverently. Today, we can go forth, glorifying the Lord by our life a little more.

We can embrace the gifts of the Sacraments, remembering our initiation into the Body of Christ through Baptism every time we sign ourselves in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, remembering to ask forgiveness and receive absolution in Reconciliation. Father would love to see all of you as often as possible. We can receive Jesus completely, body, blood, soul and divinity here and now.

We can be like that grain of wheat and in dying to ourselves, produce much fruit. By looking outside ourselves, by looking to our neighbor's needs, by giving of our time, talent and treasure, by doing more of what we know we need to do and doing less of what we know we don't need to do, we become more like Christ.

We can open our hearts to the words of the psalmist and ask God to, "Create a clean heart in me." Begin each day, start right now, and be Christ for one another.