

Homily

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Who likes to be told what to do? As a kid growing up, I often struggled with my mom or dad telling me what to do. Even things I liked doing I rebelled if I “had” to do them. Right now, some of you are thinking about something you did or didn’t do because you were “told.”

My mom’s favorite meal to prepare was pork chops, mashed potatoes, and peas. To this day, I am not a fan of peas. I would play with my food, pushing it around until the peas were mixed with the mashed potatoes. And my mother would always tell me I still had to eat them. One time, I had to eat my concoction of peas and mashed potatoes for breakfast because I didn’t eat them the night before. That was an important lesson for me; I realized I had better eat my dinner or I would be enjoying it for breakfast the next day. So, I ate my peas first and quickly so I could get them out of the way. There was no skipping the peas.

Zig Ziglar said, “When you are tough on yourself, life is going to be infinitely easier on you.”

Isn’t that the way life is? We discipline ourselves to do those things we know we need to do knowing if we don’t, someone else will make us.

A close friend has a daughter. Grown now, when she was younger, around 5 or 6 years old, she would defiantly proclaim when told what to do, “You’re not the boss of me!” Now she wasn’t wrong; each of us is our own boss. We have the wonderful gift from God of Free Will, that blessing and curse. That means each of us chooses all our actions. There is nothing in this world we do or don’t do, say or don’t say, that isn’t a choice, made freely and personally.

That doesn’t mean we aren’t told what to do. And it certainly doesn’t mean there are no consequences for disobedience. Yes, we all have a boss. I have two, my wife and the bishop. As a deacon, these two are the only people who can fire me. But we always have the choice to do as we are told or not.

Our patron, St. Paul, swore obedience to his bishop, St. Peter, even though Paul disagreed with Peter sometimes (see Galatians 2:11-14).

Isn’t it better to do what we know needs to be done before someone else tells us to do it?

I don’t like being told I have to wear my seatbelt, but I wear it just the same. I know it is the right thing to do; it keeps me safe and those around me.

I don’t like being told not to text while driving, but I don’t just the same. I know it is the right thing to do; it keeps me safe and those around me.

I don't like being told to wear a face mask, wash my hands for 20 seconds and maintain social distancing, but I don't just the same. I know it is the right thing to do; it keeps me safe and those around me.

The bishop posted protocols when the churches of our diocese re-opened back in May; four pages and seven paragraphs of guidelines to keep ourselves and each other safe. In this week's Messenger, he again reiterates the need to follow these guidelines because some people are not. He lists some sobering facts about Covid-19, including the spike in cases and deaths are causing some governors to step back reopening. The bishop is pleading with us to wear face masks for our own safety and the safety of those around us.

And while I took an oath of obedience, to my wife when we were married and to the bishop when I was ordained, we all have a duty to respect the wishes of our bishop, even if we disagree.

It is up to each of us to take personal responsibility, do our part, be aware of our surroundings, keep each other safe; to love one another.

Jesus tells us today to, "Take My yoke upon you... For My yoke is easy, and My burden light."

He isn't forcing us to do this, it is our choice. But it will make life easier if we follow His directions.

So, what is this yoke of which Jesus speaks? Love! Love God; love our neighbor as ourselves. The alternative is hard, much harder than simply loving. No, loving is not easy, but it is easier than not loving. Think about all the ways we love each other. Jesus tells us to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, visit the prisoners. In a practical way, we love each other by simply listening to one another, helping one another, being kind to one another. When we feel the urge to be angry with someone, is it because we feel slighted in some way? Is it because we are being a little selfish?

Isn't being selfish the basis for all sin? When we sin, we are doing or not doing something because of our wants instead of what God wants. God wants us to be happy, and we are happiest when we align our will with His.

As we move forward this week, let's be happy, be kind, wear our face masks and love one another.