

Homily
14th Sunday in OT
July 4, 2021

Finley Peter Dunne, an American humorist, writer and journalist around the turn of the 20th century, is attributed to coining the phrase, "...comforts th' afflicted, afflicts th' comfortable," when describing the power of the press.

When I was learning homiletics, the art of preaching, we were told our words might comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. This was a way of making the point that we are frequently out of balance, that we always have work to do on ourselves to stay on track on our faith journey.

Who has ever felt above the fray, despite the world and all its chaos and all its woes, 'there but for the Grace of God go I?'

Who has ever felt beneath the turmoil, under the squabble, buried under a mountain of shame and disappointment; 'Woe is me, unworthy and despicable?'

Sometimes I feel comfortable in view of my spiritual life, especially when I judge someone else's failings. It's so easy to judge someone else when I didn't commit that offense.

Sometimes I feel afflicted, especially as I prepare for confession. It's so easy to judge myself to the point of despair, especially when I realize I'll be confessing the same sins as last time, and the time before that, and the time before that.

Confession forces me to examine my conscience, affords me graces unavailable from any other source and reminds me not only of my fallen human nature, but also of my divine calling; to be perfect as my Lord and Savior is perfect.

I often reflect on Paul's words from today's second reading; he is afflicted to the point of begging God to remove the thorn in his side and then comforted by God's words, "No, my grace is enough." So, while I can boast of my weakness, just like Paul, I can also rend my heart in my failings.

Have you ever noticed someone doing or saying something that was truly offensive? It's okay; we are allowed to judge ACTIONS, and even exhorted to; "You will know them by their fruits."

At the same time, we are to 'judge not lest we be judged,' "For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." We judge actions; we love people. As Mother Teresa said when asked what she thought about a person who commits a sinful act, she said, "You mean, beloved child of God." She didn't condone the sin, but she certainly did not condemn the sinner. Only God judges people.

Jesus, "came to His native place." Here He is rejected by those who knew Him before his ministry began. The fruit of their lack of faith was no mighty deeds."

It would have been uncomfortable for His childhood neighbors to see Jesus for who He is, the Son of God, the Divine Healer. And for their lack of faith, He couldn't help them.

Do we deny the presence of Jesus in our brothers and sisters because it makes us uncomfortable, because they are not perfect? Aren't we supposed to see Jesus in everyone?

Throughout the book of Proverbs, we read about comparisons between the wise and the foolish, the wealthy and the poor, the industrious and the slacker. It may be easy to see imperfections in others but difficult to see them in ourselves which is why humility is so important.

When I am afflicted, do I realize a little discomfort does me good? Do I avoid sharing my time, talent, and treasure when the opportunity comes up? Do I walk a little faster when I see someone with their hand out? Do I make excuses when I am called to volunteer? Discomfort reminds us of some disorder in our lives, physical, emotional, or spiritual, implicit or explicit, whether I realize it or not. And when I don't realize it, that discomfort is a sign for me to humbly take a closer look at myself.

When I am comfortable, I have an opportunity to take account of myself and embrace those things I know I need to do or say. It's not easy, because I'm comfortable. Why rock the boat? Am I spending my time (actually it's God's time on loan to me, but that's another homily), am I spending my time doing good works? By what fruits will I be known?

The only difference between Judas and Peter is that Judas fell into despair and Peter sought forgiveness. Both sins were grave; both men failed. One gave up; the other was sorry.

We, too, due to original sin and our own personal sinfulness, fall and fail time after time. Like Judas and Peter, we have two choices:

We can give up. Some give up by walking away from the faith (believing in God is too hard, so I'll just deny He exists); some give up by denying their sin (it wasn't that bad; I didn't hurt anybody; nobody knows, so what does it matter); some give up by justifying their actions (what I did was wrong, but it was for the better good).

Or, we can look at ourselves, really look long, hard and deep. We can be honest and humble, recognize and acknowledge our failings, own them (yup, that was me – I did that) own those sins we repeat over and over and over. We call this Examination of Conscience. We then seek forgiveness. Yes, we can ask God directly, and yes, He will forgive us because He is mercy. But without the Sacrament of Confession, how do we know? How can we know? Only by the words of absolution from the priest:

“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins...”

I must confess – I nearly come to tears every time I hear these words from my confessor.

I've heard that priests find the Sacrament of Confession the place where they experience God's love and mercy most powerfully and tangibly at work in his church, similar to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which we are about to experience right here, right now.

Whether we are afflicted or comfortable, in denial or struggling, we have consolation in our Lord and Savior. And we have the instrument of His love and mercy in our priests, right here, throughout our diocese and around the world. God's love knows no bounds. God's mercy knows no limits.

We have a choice, but I believe there is only one right answer; first and most importantly, be humble; make a good, honest examination of conscience, make a good, honest confession to a priest, say, "I'm sorry," receive absolution, do penance, and then, bask in the warmth of His infinite love and mercy. Don't wait; schedule an appointment for confession with your priest today.