

Homily
22nd Sunday in OT
September 3, 2023

A scientist, believing he had figured out all of God's creation, all science, all physics, all biology, all the mysteries of the universe, decided man was beyond God. He went to God and said, "We have it all figured out. We don't need you anymore. We can create everything you created." God smiled, stepped back and said, "Go for it. Good luck." The scientist said, "I'll start with human beings," and bent down and scooped a handful of dirt. God stopped the scientist, and said, "Hold on; that's mine; get your own dirt."

Have you ever believed that you know best? Whether it's at work or at home or here at church, you just believe you know better. Maybe it's how the cloths should be folded or put away. Or maybe it's the proper organization of the tools in the garage. Or maybe it's the way meetings are being led; you know better.

I'm guilty of this, but I have coffee mugs and t-shirts that say I'm always right. Of course, I also have a t-shirt that says my wife is always right.

I often find myself believing I know the way things ought to be. My own arrogance and pride too often stand in the way of the truth. And what is the truth? There is only one God; and I'm not Him. There are certainly things that are in our area of control that we are truly responsible for. And there are things that are within our sphere of influence that we may guide in a certain way. And then there are things that are outside our area of control or our sphere of influence.

We cannot control the weather. We cannot control things that have come to pass. And we cannot control other people. And we certainly cannot control God.

I'm reminded of a little boy who loved baseball. One day, he misplaced his mitt. He loved that mitt. He couldn't imagine playing baseball without his favorite mitt. As he went to bed, he got on his knees and prayed to Jesus that he would find his mitt, "I'll be nice to my sister if you help me find my mitt." He went to bed, tossed and turned, got back on his knees and prayed, "I'll be nice to my sister for two weeks if you help me find my mitt." He got back into bed, tossed and turned, got out of bed, ran to the living room where there was a small statue of Mary, grabbed it, ran back to his room, hid the statue in his sock drawer, got on his knees and prayed, "if you ever want to see your mother again..." We cannot control God.

Peter tried to control God. Peter listened as, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Peter would have nothing to do with it. Peter, who was just named the rock on which Jesus would build His church, was now named Satan. Peter cannot control God. And what we may not remember is that although Jesus is God, Jesus is also human, with all the frailties that come with it. Jesus was cold, just as we are sometimes cold. Jesus was hot, just as we are sometimes hot. Jesus was afraid, just as we are sometimes afraid. But what could Jesus be afraid of; He's God. Yes, but He's also human.

Jesus was looking forward to His Passion, but not for the suffering, but for the victory. Jesus wasn't looking forward to the suffering He would endure at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes; He was looking forward to His resurrection. As God, he knew all His Father had planned for Him and He obediently accepted it. It was not His will, but His Father's Will. Jesus named Peter an obstacle to that which Jesus knew was His destiny. Peter was thinking as human beings think; selfishly, arrogantly, pridefully. Jesus continues with His command, to deny ourselves and follow Jesus.

Jeremiah, in the first reading, cannot deny God, because God's name was like a fire burning in his heart. That is how we all need to embrace our destiny, our role as a member of the Family of God. We have God's message written on our hearts and it should be like a burning fire. Not like our own selfish wants and desires, not the way we want things done, but the way God wants things done. Jeremiah was scorned for his words, but those words are words of love and mercy, the words of our God and Father, the words of sacrifice and glory, for His name.

What is written on our hearts? It's worth a minute of our time to consider. In a few moments, Jesus will become present on this altar. At the words of consecration, Jesus will be with us, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. It is worth our time to reflect on just what that means. Jesus embraced His Passion, not because he was looking forward to the suffering, but because He loves us so much that He couldn't help but make the ultimate sacrifice for us. And He continues to make Himself present to us on every altar everywhere throughout the world in this Sacred Sacrament. Can you feel it burning in your hearts?