

Homily: 2nd Sunday: 2017: Cycle A: Is 49: 3, 5-6; Ps. 40; 1 Corth 1: 1-3; Jn 1: 29-34

“Growing in the Spiritual Life during Ordinary Time”

Last weekend we concluded the Christmas season with the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord; now we are back into the “ordinary” time of the Church’s liturgical year - until March 1 when Lent begins this year. So the big question is: *how do we grow in holiness during “ordinary” time?* All of us if we are somewhat serious about our Faith life work on some spiritual things during Advent and Christmas and Lent and Easter, but what about outside of those high points? A few things to look at: to help in that regard.

1. **Obedience:** to Christ and the authoritative teaching of His Catholic Church which is made know to us though the Sacred Magisterium - the Pope and the Bishops teaching in union with him. Obedience means having a listening heart. **We are to form our inner moral sense or conscience by the standards of Christ and His Church and not by the standards of the world!** Just “following our conscience” is not enough – it needs to be a well formed conscience based on the teachings of our Faith revealed by God through the Catholic Church. Are we trying to do this: *to keep God’s Commandments - the 10 Commandments and then the Commandments God makes known to us through the Church.* To form our consciences properly: this is why we have Catholic schools and catechism classes for our young people, but it should carry over into adulthood. If we don’t know the content of the Faith, how can we live it well? Over these next two months leading up to Lent, take some time to watch some good shows on EWTN the Catholic cable channel (program guides are in the back of the Church), and/or to read a good Catholic spiritual book about Jesus or Mary or the saints, or the Catechism of the Catholic Church. As I mentioned in the bulletin, this is the main reason why I am getting this Parish Lending Library started; hopefully in the next few weeks it will be up and running, and then you can borrow a good book to read from our Library in the basement of the Church.
2. **Humility:** It takes humility to be willing to follow God and the Catholic faith when life comes up against us, and it would be more pleasant to take the “easy”

path of compromise and rationalization. So many Christians today are “friends” of the world, but as the saints say, *you can't be a friend of God if you are a friend of the world at the same time*: see e.g., St. Ignatius of Antioch. Of course “world” in this context of the spiritual life doesn't mean the beauty of creation or the material creation we live in on earth – it means the worldly mentality which is so prevalent today: living life as if God doesn't exist, or if He does exist, He doesn't care what we do here on earth morally or spiritually. Of course that is one of the main lies of the Evil One, the devil, who tries to trick all humans into thinking they can be God, the arbiter of Good and evil – which is the original temptation that man gave into as laid out in the Garden of Eden story. In contrast we are called to be like St. John the Baptist who pointed people to Jesus and who said *Jesus must increase while I must decrease*. We need to acknowledge our weakness and our spiritual blindness, so that Jesus can heal us over time. That takes real humility.

3. **Desire for Holiness:** Do we desire in our minds, our hearts and our wills to be holy as God is holy? That is what St. Paul is reminding us of in the 2nd reading today, and in the 1st reading from Isaiah we are reminded that God called us to be holy from the moment we were conceived in our mother's womb – to be a light or witness to the nations of God's holiness. To grow in holiness means to become more like Jesus in our thoughts, words, and actions each day. The 10 commandments and the teachings of the Church on faith and morals are **the guardrails** in that process as we travel along the path of earthly life. In all honesty, sometimes we don't feel like being holy, sometimes we are attached to sin and selfishness – but if we allow the Holy Spirit to work over time He will transform us, so that we don't just follow our feelings which are fickle, i.e., go up and down, but instead consistently choose the good in our wills, even when our feelings go against our wills. *This is where the gift of a disciplined daily prayer life, regular reception of the Sacrament of Confession and the Eucharist, and practicing some daily acts of self-denial become essential*. How serious are we about growing in holiness? Let's take the next two months before Lent and work on the most important thing in earthly life: growing in holiness. God bless you.