

5th Monday of Lent
April 11, 2011
Fr. Joe Bambenek
St. Joseph's Church, Edina, MO

Daniel 13:1-9,15-17,19-30,33-62

Psalm 23

John 8:1-11

"Be patient and kind."

While there are many lessons that one can take from today's readings, most prominently themes regarding courage, mercy and justice, in this homily I will focus on lessons of patience and kindness.

In the gospel reading we hear of patience. Patience can be one of the most challenging virtues to master. For we want what we want when we want it. Sometimes what we want is merely a desire of ours; other times, what we want is truly intrinsically good. A lack of patience can take many different forms. One of them is to struggle with patience when we see those around us making mistakes in their lives; perhaps even major mistakes. And the more we love them, the more difficult it can be to see them make mistakes. For such situations, Jesus gives us an example in today's gospel reading through his patient treatment of the woman caught in adultery. Rather than condemning her for what she had done wrong, after all, she does not deny her guilt, Jesus shows her mercy. At His word, the stoning could have begun. Yet He did not stone her. He did not definitively break the relationship. Jesus, instead, is patient with her. He not only spares her life; he also does not yell and scream at her. He instead witnesses love and patience to her, and tells her firmly to go and sin no more; trusting that she will learn a lesson from her brush with death. In the process, He also teaches a lesson to the others who want swift justice for her and to entrap Jesus in the process. It is important to add that Jesus' example of patience does not mean wishwashyness. Jesus did not tell her: "don't worry, it was OK that you committed adultery, after all, marriage is hard and few people are really faithful. People who say otherwise are just mean for insisting that you should be faithful in your marriage." Instead, Jesus patiently spoke the truth to her in love by telling her to 'go and sin no more.' While not explicit in the gospel account, we can assume that He got the message to her accusers that they, too, should work on growing in love, patience, and personal holiness.

We hear a somewhat similar, somewhat different story in the first reading. This time, a woman is unjustly accused of being caught in adultery, and is condemned to death. Yet Suzanna is not guilty; she had acted rightly. She, too, is spared through the act of another, this time the prophet Daniel and his courageous kindness. Daniel, a mere youth, when inspired by God rose to her defense. Daniel could have kept quiet. After all, he did not witness the event [of which she was accused]. Yet he spoke up, and did so in a culture in which youth were particularly looked down upon. Furthermore, as he did so, Daniel challenged two of the most powerful, and obviously ruthless men in his community. It was an act of kindness that took tremendous courage and faith. An act that spared an innocent life. It serves as a reminder that acts of kindness can make a huge difference in the lives of others; and that sometimes acts of kindness are not easy, they are not always convenient for us, they might even require a bit of risk and or sacrifice.

“Be patient and kind.”

You may be wondering, why did the unfamiliar priest celebrating Mass with us this morning choose “be patient and kind” as the theme among all the possibilities to preach on from today’s readings. Well, that theme is the biggest reason that I am here to celebrate Mass with you today.

During my introduction at the start of Mass I failed to mention that I was ordained to the priesthood last May. One of the traditions of being a new priest is that during our first year of priesthood we are able to go back to places that have been important on our journey to the priesthood to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving. Which is why I am here this morning. You see, in the late 1980s and early 1990s I was a student at what was then called Northeast Missouri State down Route 6 in Kirksville. One day when I was passing through Edina I saw this beautiful, massive church as I approached town. So I decided to stop in. You can imagine how pleased I was to learn that it was not only a Catholic Church, but it was St. Joseph’s Church, named after my patron saint. I was further pleased by the beautiful interior, with statues and stained glass windows of the saints that were important in my life at the time. After admiring the church I took a few minutes to pray, as it was a time of challenge in my life. As I made the closing sign of the cross [on my prayer], I looked up and saw a banner on the front of the choir loft which read “be patient and kind.” It was a message that immediately both convicted and encouraged my heart. When I returned to Kirksville, I made a sign with those words and placed it on the wall of my room. During the rest of my time as a college student I made several pilgrimages to Edina to pray, and would stop by the church when I passed through town on other occasions. And in the years since my graduation, I have been an active alum of what is now Truman State... which meant that I would pass through Edina once or twice a year on the way to Kirksville, and I would stop in the church to pray. Even when I have been far from Northeast Missouri, the message “be patient and kind” has been a great encouragement and guided me at challenging times in my life since.

Hence, I am here to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving in gratitude for the gift of the priesthood, and also for the faithfulness of the Catholics of Edina. In particular, for the way that through the witness of your beautiful church building, you impacted me on the journey to the priesthood. It is a blessing to see a Catholic community which built such a beautiful church, and which has dedicated the resources to maintain it and to recently renovate it. And also a Catholic community which has been willing to keep that building open for prayer at all hours of the day and night, for many of my trips through Edina over the years were not exactly in the middle of the day. Especially during these last two weeks of Lent, with the joy of Easter that follows, may your witness, like the witness of your church building, remain strong: may you be instruments of God’s love and truth to all you meet, especially, through acts of patience and kindness.

“Be patient and kind.”