

## **HOMILY – 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME “B” 1-28-2018**

“Robert Edwin Flickinger, you are grounded for one month, end of discussion – period!” That word “period”, a small dot on a computer screen, ends all discussion. Any hope of negotiation or future discussion ends at period.

In today’s incident related in the Gospel Jesus is in the synagogue teaching and the people are hanging on to his every word. All of a sudden there is a disturbance and a troubled man is screaming and yelling at the top of his voice – “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” Everyone turns around and they see a man that is obviously troubled. Many knew him. He is crazy, he is possessed by a demon, he’s nuts. They probably wanted to chase him away. After all, this is a place of worship and there is no room for his kind here. Period!

Jesus, on the other hand, refuses to put a period on this man’s condition and actions and character. Instead Jesus chooses to relate to the man with a comma. Jesus probably was thinking, “Yes, he is very troubled, he needs help and I will offer it to him.”

How many times in our life have we experienced pain or trouble? At those moments, especially when they are serious, we might be tempted to conclude that misery will last forever. We place a period and say, “That’s it. I am finished.” The comma at these times can become a sign of hope, an indication that we will not remain where we are forever. God can move us forward. God can do something where we saw no possibility.

The troubled man who came into the Synagogue was looking for something new. The evil spirit that possessed him had robbed him of his freedom and joy. The man may have felt “I’m done! This spirit will continue to enslave me for the rest of my life.” But Jesus in his loving compassion helps the man to see that what he thought was the end was only a pause. Jesus drives out the demon, and the man enters into a new life.

Today’s Gospel wants us to know that when we encounter those times when we feel we have come to the end of our rope, that there seems to be no way out of what we are going through – we need to move away from the period and know that God can move us forward.

We all have had the experience of being alienated from a family member or a friend. Maybe we said something about them that was wrong or we did something that was cruel. It leaves our relationship in shambles. Jesus would tell us to move from period and believe that estrangement does not have to be final, that apologies can heal, and that God can heal what is broken.

Maybe we are parents and are dismayed because of bad decisions made by our children or our grandchildren. If only they would have listened to us, handled their finances better, married someone else, and avoided alcohol and drugs. They dug their hole and they have no future. Comma, Jesus won’t give up. Through following the example of the compassion and forgiveness of Jesus, we can still help move the people we love beyond their mistakes.

Many here today have been devastated because someone we love has died. The loss and the hole in our heart is so huge that we are certain we will never recover. We need

to believe that God can still heal the pain and still move us to a new place.

In the midst of the inevitable challenges and disappointments in our lives – we must avoid putting a period where God has placed a comma. Our lives may feel like we have ground to a halt. But where we find ourselves is not the end. Jesus can do new things. He can drive the demon out. Our God can move us past the painful pause and lead our lives to a blessed conclusion. I encourage you to go home today and with a black magic marker, place on a piece of white paper a large, bold comma and place it in a place you will see it every day. And remember the quote of Gracie Allen, the TV and radio partner of George Burns, who wrote in one of her diaries: **“Never place a period where God has placed a comma.”**

## **Closing Story 1-28-18**

One night Timmy is walking home and all of a sudden a thief jumps on him. The thief and Tim begin to wrestle and they roll about on the ground, with Tim putting up a tremendous fight. However, the thief manages to get the better of Tim and pins him to the ground. Then the thief goes through Tim’s pockets and searches him. All the thief can find on Tim is twenty-five cents. The thief is so surprised at that, that he asks him why he had bothered to fight so hard for only twenty-five cents.

“Was that all you wanted?” Tim replies. “I thought you were after the five hundred dollars in my sock!”