

HOMILY – 5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME “B”

2-4-2018

Several years ago when Hungary was still under Communist rule, a Hungarian businessman entered the police station in Budapest to ask for permission to begin the difficult process to immigrate to the United States. The police officer was surprised by such a request because it was hardly ever granted. Nevertheless he was curious. So he asked the man, “Why is it you want to leave your homeland? Are you unhappy here in Hungary?” The businessman replied, “I have no complaints.” “Is it perhaps your job,” said the official, “the job the government assigned to you? Are you not pleased with your work, don’t you find it satisfying?” The man said again, “I have no complaints.” “Perhaps it’s your living conditions? Do you want a bigger house?” Again came the same response, “I have no complaints.” So finally the official put down his pen and said, “Look if you want me to even consider your request, you have to tell me why you want to go to the United States.” The businessman looked at him and said, “Because in the United States I can have complaints.”

In today’s first reading, poor Job is at the lowest point of his life. He felt like his whole world was crumbling around him. God allowed him to be tested by Satan to see if he would remain faithful to God even under great duress. In a series of disasters, his flocks, his wealth, even his children are all destroyed. Job expresses his duress by speaking a long series of negative and pessimistic complaints. He feels like a slave, his days seem meaningless and his nights are a constant nightmare. He has lost hope. He sees no goodness around him. I think we could say Job is in a deep depression. But he is also being honest about what he was feeling. He held nothing back. From a human standpoint, Job had every reason to be complaining.

How often do we meet people and they ask us, “how you doing?” In most cases that question is really a greeting and not a sincere invitation to enter into dialogue. And if we really told them how we are doing, it might result in a very short conversation. We could have just buried our father and if someone at Martin’s asks how we are doing today, we are likely to respond, “Fine.” We could have just been diagnosed with brain cancer but when the UPS man asks, “how’s it going”, we answer, “Not bad.” We are polite to strangers. We are more likely to be honest to the people we love.

Job had no problem telling God how he was doing. He was miserable. He felt comfortable telling God what he was going through. He felt the freedom to say what he was thinking, what he was feeling. Such honesty, while difficult to hear, is an indication of the closeness of the relationship Job had with God.

Jesus was able to be honest with his Father about what he was feeling. After a long day of finding himself in the midst of suffering and sick people surrounding him with calls for healing and mercy, he gets away the next morning to be alone and pray. He had to be feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by the sadness he was seeing. I can only imagine he talked about all the misery he was seeing, how much there was and how such pain and suffering was affecting him. He makes a decision. He tells his Father and his

disciples, I can't do this anymore here – I need to move on from here and bring my healing presence to others.

When we are hurt, when we have a burden that is difficult to carry, our mental health depends upon finding a relationship that is deep enough and free enough that we can entrust our pain to another. We all need relationships that are secure enough to handle our complaints. God wants us to be in such a relationship. God wants us to know that we can say what we really think, what we really feel and who we really are. God grants us that freedom even if such honesty involves anger, pain and pessimism. God may not agree with our assessment of the situation, but God wants us to have the freedom to be who we really are in His presence.

God calls us to a deep and honest relationship with him. If we look at our life and we find joy and happiness in all we do, if our health is good, if our family life is stable, if our relationships are life-giving and nurturing, then we should thank God and lift our hands in praise. But if our life is filled with anger, if we are carrying a deep hurt that we cannot let go of, if we have doubts about life, if we have fear about the future, if we can't get control of an addiction, if there is in our heart an emptiness that we are afraid to express even to ourselves, don't hold it in. Unload to the Lord. The Lord invites us to share our anger, our hurt, our doubt, and our emptiness. This is who we really are at this time, what we really think, what we really need, how we really feel. I can assure you that whatever we say, God will not be surprised or offended. For whatever we can dish out, God is more than willing to handle.

If we can pray with this kind of honesty, it will change us. But in order to be changed, we must come before the Lord as the people we really are. When we give to God our anger, God can heal it. When we give to God our doubt and emptiness, God can fill it. When we complain to the Lord that we are desperate and without hope, we open the door for healing and new life. Because God loves us, we can have complaints and be assured God hears us. Like Jesus, we can turn to the Father in prayer and find the courage to move on.

Closing Story 2-4-18

Heather and Marcie hadn't seen each other in a while so they decided to meet for lunch. Talk naturally got around to their respective boyfriends. Marcie confided that there really wasn't anyone special in her life. Heather, on the other hand, was beaming about the man she'd found. "He's perfect, handsome, and last night when we went out to dinner he said the four little words I have been waiting to hear a man say to me. "

"And he said will you marry me?" Marcie asked.

Heather replied, "No. He said, 'Put your money away.' "