

HOMILY ~ 22nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME AUGUST 27-28, 2022

A number of years ago, I volunteered with the MCREST program in Macomb County. It was a program where a group of churches housed the homeless for one week. People came in about 5:00 PM, we served dinner and we had facilities to take a shower and wash their clothes. They slept overnight, and then we served breakfast in the morning. I signed up to be one of the hosts for dinner. I had dinner with our guests, and then I visited and played games with them during the evening. I really connected with one of the men who was about my age, and we shared common interests. He had something horrible happen to him that caused him to be homeless, but other than that, our lives were very similar. I stayed a little later than I was scheduled and, by the time I left, the evening shift was gone and the overnight shift had begun. As I was leaving, a volunteer at the door very abruptly yelled at me: *"If you leave now, you are not getting back in; and I am going to report you."* I was kinda taken aback, so I turned around and said: *"Excuse me,"* and he repeated what he said. I realized that he did not know me, and he thought I was one of the homeless. I told him that I was a volunteer, and I was going home. I learned a lot that evening and thought about it a lot for days to come. First of all, my immediate reaction was being insulted that someone would mistake me for a homeless person. I just spent the evening with someone who was a lot like me. Did I think I was better than the homeless? I was more grateful for having a home to go to. I realized that I was blessed to have a home, and it was possible that I could end up homeless one day. I also wondered if I treated certain groups of people in a condescending way, the way that volunteer treated me that night. He was a good person. He was volunteering his time to help the homeless, so I think he had good intentions.

In the Gospel Reading today, Jesus tells us: *"When you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."* I do not think this applies only to people we invite to a banquet. I think it applies to all of the people we have the opportunity to interact with every day. We tend to gravitate toward the people that we perceive to be the most like us because it is comfortable, and it is usually a pleasant experience so we get rewarded for that experience. But Jesus is calling us to expand the people we come in contact with, the people we are called to serve. Jesus certainly reached out to the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, but that is not the only people he reached out to. He also reached out to ordinary people like the apostles. He also reached out to the religious leaders, the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus reaches out to all of us. I think Jesus sees all of us as having equal dignity. We are not the same, but we are all equal; and I think we need to start seeing all people as equal.

Seeing people as equal starts with humility, and the readings today call us to humility. Humility is all about self-knowledge and seeing ourselves as we are. We all have strengths and weaknesses. We tend to embrace our strengths and hide our weaknesses, deny them or hide

them behind a mask; however, we need to embrace who we are. We all have strengths and weaknesses, one is not better or worse than the other, just different. We should see encountering people that we do not know or people that we perceive to be different from ourselves as an opportunity for growth. When we come to Church, it is natural to want to reach out to our friends; but we also have to reach out to others to make them feel welcome. If you are at coffee and donuts and see a couple of people sitting at a table by themselves, sit with them or ask them to sit with you.

When we encounter people that we perceive to be different from ourselves, we need to be more aware of our own biases. I used to have biases against the homeless. But when I got to know that guy at MCREST, I found out that we are not so different. Through the work I have done with the homeless through the years, I know I am not better than them. I may be in a better place right now, but that is it. When I give it a chance and I interact with people of another race, or religion, or political party, or sexual orientation or gender identity, I end up discovering that we have way more in common than we have differences. Be open to the individual. We do not have to discuss our differences. Maybe it is best to discuss what we have in common and see how alike we really are. If you expect a negative encounter, you are likely to get one. If you have a negative bias, you are likely to treat the individual in a negative way. Just like that volunteer treated me when he thought I was homeless. Relating to one another is how we are going to break down all of the divisions in our culture today, one bias at a time.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim