

HOMILY ~ JANUARY 14/15, 2023

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

How many of you have heard of “*The Butterfly Effect*?” It was first proposed in 1963 by Edward Lorenz as part of his doctoral thesis. It stated that a butterfly could flap its wings and set molecules of air in motion, which would move other molecules of air, in turn moving more molecules of air – eventually capable of starting a hurricane on the other side of the planet. It was not taken seriously. People laughed at it, but it was a fascinating concept. It became a staple of science fiction movies and comic books. However, over 30 years later, the scientific community proved that it was, in fact, true and is now widely accepted in the scientific community as “*The Law of Sensitive Dependence Upon Initial Conditions.*” The first movement of any matter, including people, sets in motions a whole chain of effects. One example: A guy left his lab for a month. He came back, found mold growing in a petri dish and decided to keep it rather than throw it out. The man was Alexander Fleming. The mold turned out to be the mold that produces penicillin, which is among the most important drugs ever discovered, has helped millions of people over the years and will likely continue to do so. This came from his decision not to throw out the mold. I think the lesson that we can learn from the *Butterfly Effect* is that everything matters.

In the First Reading, we hear “*I will make you light to the nations.*” We have heard that before, but what exactly does this mean? We can see how we can bring light to the world through our public vocations as parent, doctor, teacher, priest, business person, trade person; but that is only part of our vocation. We also have vocations within vocations, like John the Baptist in the Gospel Reading. He saw his vocation as preparing the way of the Lord by Baptizing and preaching repentance; but all of a sudden, in this reading, he identifies that Jesus is the Son of God. He was likely surprised when he realized it, but he said it. We are not sure who he said it to, but I think it initiated a whole chain of events that he did not foresee. This may have been the most important thing he did in his lifetime. I think we have a vocation that we are aware of; and then we have the vocations that unfold during our lives, and we will never completely understand what they are in this world. We are here in this place, at this time and with these people for a reason; and we frequently do not know exactly what that reason is.

If we believe that everything matters, it changes the way we live our lives. Our lives are so interconnected that everything we do has the potential to change the world. We start each day with a list of things that we think are important for us to accomplish that day, but maybe the most important thing we do is something we would never foresee as important or even significant. Maybe with all of the things I have planned, the most important interaction I have during the day is with the wait staff when I go out to lunch. Maybe we are called to be light to the nations in absolutely everything we do, because we cannot foresee the effect that our actions will have. While we do not know the effect of our actions, we can behave in a way that is more likely to bring light rather than darkness into the world. Maybe that means not having a knee jerk reaction when we are irritated by an interaction with someone. If we take a few moments, maybe we can react with kindness. Maybe it means taking time with someone you interact with at a chance meeting. We may be on a schedule to get things done, but does this preclude taking time with this person.

Since I have been ordained, I wear my collar almost all of the time. I know it positively affects the interactions I have with people because I am aware that I am always representing the Catholic Church. I know that I cannot blast someone, even when I want to, and that works most of the time. I also have all kinds of discussions with people I never would have otherwise in the drug store, in line at the grocery store or in a waiting room. Sometimes people blast me because they have issues with the Catholic Church; and those conversations are not so pleasant, but maybe they make a difference to that person. Most of the conversations are very interesting and pleasant, important to me and to them.

So think about it. Do you believe that the *Butterfly Effect* is real? Do you believe everything matters? How will this affect how you live your life?

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim