

At the time all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.” Words from our 2nd reading today from the 12th chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

A few years ago, I remember a conversation with some folks from the Diocese regarding the Road to Renewal, and we were talking about how this is going to drastically affect the lifestyles of priests and the ways in which we would be functioning within the parishes. And one of the questions that was asked of me in this conversation was something along the lines of, “are you open to receiving mentoring?” I responded by saying, “Well, I am always open to learning new things and receiving guidance, but quite frankly, I need a coach more than a mentor – I need someone who will hold me accountable and push me daily and keep me on track.” In so many situations, I know what I have to do, and I know how to do it, but if the given endeavor in my life gets sidetracked, it’s generally because I recognize in myself that I personally lack the discipline and the patience to make it happen.

The second reading regarding discipline really resonates with me today, and I imagine with many of us, especially when Hebrews says, “at the time all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain.” Why is that so? Because we don’t like discipline. It’s not fun. It can often mean going against our instincts and feelings and desires. It involves sacrifice. It means surrender to that voice that subconsciously reminds us of all the things we should be doing instead. Why don’t we eat healthy, why don’t we drink more water – because we lack the discipline to say no to snacking, portion control or binge drinking. Why don’t we spend more spend quality time with our family or pray more – because we’re too tired, we don’t feel like it, and we make excuses, and yet at the same time our lack of discipline gives way to wasting hours on video games, streaming shows, and scrolling through feeds, instead of accomplishing anything meaningful. Our schedules are overbooked because we crave experience and hate missing out on things, so our busyness owes to a lack of discipline in saying “no” to all those extraneous things. We aren’t disciplined in what we take in allowing our eyes to see inappropriate things, nor are we disciplined in what we dish out, taking out our frustrations and unfiltered feelings upon others without a modicum of respect. We can spend our money in undisciplined ways. We might brush our teeth but forget to floss. Even in sports, we think we can make a play, but in abandoning our responsibilities and the team game plan, we end up getting beaten because of our lack of discipline. We know all these things, so it’s not a matter of education, better guidance, or advice from experts. We’d like to make the lifestyle changes but we can’t seem to get anywhere. And even if we put our mind to it, there is no lasting impact, no sustained transformation. Why is that? Because our lives change when our habits change (2x).

We lack the discipline to make something happen and still we ask, "Isn't there an easier way?" How stubborn we are! If we try resort to our own willpower to resist temptation, our inner voices of desire will prevail over our better judgements. Discipline allows us to be strong against temptation so as not to make ourselves vulnerable. If we obsess over our goals, we will give up when they are not so quickly achieved. It is discipline that focuses us on the planned and manageable actions that will get us there: a book isn't written all at once, but 300 words a day is manageable and losing 20 pounds is outside of my immediate control but I do have power over whether I eat dessert or not. If we wait until the perfect moment, we will find that it never comes. Discipline doesn't allow us to push it off or make excuses; discipline means we are on the clock, even now. When we lack discipline, we get sidetracked, we betray our own best interests, and deny ourselves an authentic self-love. The word for discipline in the Greek, *Padeia*, is not a matter of punishment, but rather it means a sort of training for life. Sure, "all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain," Hebrews reminds us, "yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it." It's not that I don't need a mentor, but I really need a coach - someone who is there for me every step of the way, who will hold my feet to the fire and keep me disciplined without excuses, who will continuously practice these things and train with me with me until they become a habit and routine and manner of life that is not so easily given up on. A coach keeps us disciplined and won't let you get sidetracked because they care about you and what you are working towards.

Today, the Lord responds as a coach to the question of salvation that is asked of him in the Gospel. His answer is not to say exactly how many or few will be saved or to give a teaching on the mystery of salvation, but rather he is there to push us forwards, recognizing those who will be saved are the ones who put forth the necessary effort and who commit themselves wholeheartedly to this endeavor. The keyword Jesus offers here is that you have *to strive*: "Strive to enter the narrow gate." You have to continuously work at it or else you may not be strong enough. Because Jesus loves us, he prevents us from becoming complacent. Our coach Jesus reminds us that the goal of salvation is not on par with receiving a participation trophy. Think about it: if the Buffalo Bills thought that because they were the favorites to win the Superbowl this year and that they could get by merely showing up, then their season is doomed. They will discover the hard way that the first will be last and the last will come in first. Their discipline will keep them on track in pursuit of their goal. The same is true with our lives of faith. Casual association with Jesus is not enough. Presumption of our own entry into heaven one day without effort on our part will leave us standing at the door knocking. We need to show genuine commitment on our part. Disciples need discipline in their lives of faith. As Hebrews tells us, let us not disdain the discipline of the Lord, but open ourselves to being coached by him, that we may strive and one day enter through the narrow gates of heaven.

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 123

Reading 1

Is 66:18-21

Thus says the LORD:

I know their works and their thoughts,
and I come to gather nations of every language;
they shall come and see my glory.

I will set a sign among them;
from them I will send fugitives to the nations:
to Tarshish, Put and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal and Javan,
to the distant coastlands
that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory;
and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.
They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations
as an offering to the LORD,
on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries,
to Jerusalem, my holy mountain, says the LORD,
just as the Israelites bring their offering
to the house of the LORD in clean vessels.
Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 117:1, 2

R.(Mk 16:15) Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Praise the LORD, all you nations;
glorify him, all you peoples!

R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.

or:

R. Alleluia.

For steadfast is his kindness toward us,
and the fidelity of the LORD endures forever.

R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 2

Heb 12:5-7, 11-13

Brothers and sisters,
You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:
"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord
or lose heart when reproved by him;
for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines;
he scourges every son he acknowledges."
Endure your trials as "discipline";
God treats you as sons.
For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?
At the time,
all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,
yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness
to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.
Make straight paths for your feet,
that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.
Alleluia

Jn 14:6

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord;
no one comes to the Father, except through me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Lk 13:22-30

Jesus passed through towns and villages,
teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem.
Someone asked him,
"Lord, will only a few people be saved?"
He answered them,
"Strive to enter through the narrow gate,
for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter

but will not be strong enough.
After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door,
then will you stand outside knocking and saying,
'Lord, open the door for us.'
He will say to you in reply,
'I do not know where you are from.
And you will say,
'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.'
Then he will say to you,
'I do not know where you are from.
Depart from me, all you evildoers!'
And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth
when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
and all the prophets in the kingdom of God
and you yourselves cast out.
And people will come from the east and the west
and from the north and the south
and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.
For behold, some are last who will be first,
and some are first who will be last."