

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 5th Sunday Lent Year A1

I remember back in college I was worked for a local orthodontist on weekends, doing landscape/maintenance work for him. He would sometimes come by the part of the yard I was in, and talk, maybe as I was trimming shrubs or spreading mulch. One time we were talking about careers, and he mentioned that he thought of retiring from orthodontics, going back to school and getting a psychology degree to become a counselor/therapist. He mentioned that one of his greatest stresses/frustrations of orthodontic practice was the difficulty of 'patient compliance. He said he could do his part with teeth, but would the patient follow through doing his/her part? I had to smile as I myself was a graduate of braces myself (and for me, what was supposed to be one year in braces, turned out to be two and half years!-In my defense, I always thought I was faithful about wearing rubber bands properly, and using my retainer faithfully!) But anyway, I mentioned that such a move for him might be like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, because I figure that we humans are less 'compliant' about following through on psychological prescriptions than on our orthodontic prescriptions. What I meant is that straightening out our psychological problems sounds so much more dependent on patient compliance than straightening out our teeth. But our discussion, did further my own vocational discernment. That conversation with him, came to my mind for me when I read today's gospel.

Because something seems different to me about Jesus in the reading today. Something is going on with Him? He is struggling with people's compliance (their faithfulness in following through). Do you feel, like me, that there is a higher level of emotion, being displayed by Jesus than we usually see? I am not complaining. It is good to see, a we feel comforted knowing that He feels with us, can get upset like us. *(Yes, he is our mighty shepherd--John 10:11—but he has the deepest of empathy for us, too understanding and experiencing emotion just as we do. Hebrews 4:15 tells us "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are..."*) Several places throughout scripture, specifically states that Jesus was moved by the emotions of others, such as in Luke 7:13 when he saw the grieving widow at Nain burying her only son *(it says 'he was moved with pity')* or in Matthew 14:14 , as he got out of a boat on to shore and seeing a large 'hurting' crowd, it said 'his heart was moved with compassion' for them' (& in Matthew 9:36 again He saw them, and thought how much like a lost flock they looked). But again, something today, seems

to be bothering Jesus **more than normal**. The reading says two times he was visibly upset, in verse 33 that Jesus ‘became perturbed and deeply troubled’ and verse 38 that he ‘was perturbed again’. Add to this that in verse 35 specifically we hear that that ‘Jesus wept’. We don’t get any more ‘moved with feeling’ than that! So what about this occasion has Jesus so upset? What is bothering Him so much? Death? Specifically, Lazarus’ death? We can all relate. Haven’t we all been sideswiped by death? It brings everything out of us – sadness, confusion, loss, guilt, numbness, anger, regret & resignation. Simply put, we are bombarded with feelings. And Jesus is here too!

I suspect that what is behind a lot of Jesus’ upset and this display of more than normal emotion for Him, is also some ‘discouragement and disappointment’ with His followers. We know He feels such a blast-wave of emotion later through his agony in the garden, not just imagining the physical terrors He would undergo, but the heart-tearing realization that he was about to be betrayed by one of his own and that no apostle really would stand up with him, all the way through it. So, I think that today’s gospel shows Jesus confronting that crushing let-down of our lack of ‘compliance’ (faith to follow through) with Him. I suspect that Jesus thought, especially those closest to Him, were farther along in trust/belief in Him as Messiah than they turn out to show Him. His ‘faithful’ don’t turn out to be as ‘faithful’ as he had hoped (Yet, thank God Jesus feels experiences like us, such as that most devastating human emotion of deflation-discouragement when life or other people don’t measure up to what we expected.) I think it broke Jesus’ heart to hear twice, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** (Verse 21-Martha & 32-Mary). As if this is all Jesus’ fault? And in verse 37, when the crowd sneers, **“Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?”** Such defeatism sure can pull a person down. And even after Martha seems to come around and affirm Jesus’ messianic identity, ‘Yes I believe in you Jesus-resurrection and life that you are’. She reverts to her diminishing, hopeless, resignation when she intervenes, ‘Oh, but don’t open that stone, Lazarus will stink-it is over four days’ (Jn 11:39). I figure the smell is going to be the easiest problem for Jesus to solve here – what about the might displayed in resuscitating the life in Lazarus’ body? But that, as always is the most important part of any miracle of Jesus – our compliance with Him (faith in Him). The physical miracle is nothing for Jesus. But

the faith-trust and compliance of His followers is what to celebrate. And when it is not there, that is what weighs Jesus down. He can bring breath back into us easily; but how about belief in hearts for Him? That is hard on Him, because that is our part! Our faith/trust in Him. That is what (lifts or lets down) moves Jesus. It jumped out at me this year that in our three week cycle of special readings (1.woman at well, 2.man born blind, and 3.Lazarus' resurrection), that each story comes to a dramatic moment (not the miracle part-but the belief part) where Jesus lays out what is most important to Him. Belief in Him, Trust in Him, keeping Faith (complying) with Him. To the woman at the well He said in John 4:21 "Believe me, (do you) woman, the hour is coming..." And , to the Man born blind in John 9:35 "Do you believe?" and to Martha in John 11:26 "Do you believe this? Jesus can perform the miracles; but does that do it for us? Not all the way, because in the end, we have to be asked, if we truly believe in Him or not? That is the harder part for Jesus – our own compliance. Jesus' miraculous work is something great, but even more is our believing and following through with Him. That part moves Him the most. And that part is ours to do. As we near Holy Week and Jesus' Passion, we may need to work on 'feeling with Him', being faithful and following through with Him by all that we do.