

St Pius-St Anthony 12th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Sometimes our reaction to an event is worse than the original event. Imagine with me this scenario that happened maybe in a choir loft attic or maybe an old garage. It goes like this: "I let out a yell, and a coworker comes over to give aid. I try to stop them and say, "Back up don't come over--there is jumping spider--be careful". They say to me, "Oh, did it bite you?" 'No' I say still holding my head, 'I jerked back...still stay away, I don't see him anymore.'" They keep on, 'So it did bite you, or did it crawl on your neck?' I end saying, "Noooo, I jerked back like whiplash and banged my head on the open cabinet door!" It wasn't the spider hurting me after all. My over-reaction did so much more damage than just a spider scurrying away, or my flipping it into the air when I pulled back the boxes.... Or I loved this learning experience taught me by my father, long ago once when my family was camping. Which by the way, today, Happy Father's Day, my Dad out there this morning, Happy Father's Day! We take a moment today to thank our Dads for the years of teaching and sacrifices for us and our families, and we thank God for them and ask Him to bless them today and everyday. Again, Happy Father's Day. And related to today's reading, way back when we kids and our family had gone camping one time over here at the Lake, we had gone out one night to cat fish, and as we moved around the lake near the shores, we must have brushed up into a bushy area by some of our lines, and my brother who was sitting in the front-most seat, said, 'Dad, back us up, back us up, there is a snake in the boat'. Dad immediately said, "Okay, everyone be still, don't move". Then he reversed the trolling motor, to pull us out, and for the most part we all just sat there, looking around our feet. The john boat was full of us and supplies. It may have shifted as we all looked around. Well, a childhood friend of mine was with us, and he saw it differently, as he said panicked, "Steve, pull this boat over to that log, I want to get out- if a snake is in here, I am getting out of here". Of course, Dad, responded, "No, I am going to get us over to the bank, stay calm and sit still." I thought, "Even one snake in boat is better than getting out and into water where they are all at; and it's night, who knows what is in the water." But I could see it. Scott's overreacting and jumping into the water was hugely more dangerous than a snake slithering over into the corner of the boat for a while. It did all work out and everyone stayed dry and no snake bites, thank goodness!

But this is what Jesus is bringing up when he says today, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). What Jesus is highlighting is that we face both external and internal threats: threats to our bodies, but also threats to our souls. Threats coming at us from outside or from others, but also threats from inside us or from ourselves in how we respond or act. For example, this becomes clear every time our country faces a terrorist

threat from foreign bad actors trying to sabotage our country's governmental principles. An easy example here is Al Qaeda or ISIS, that try to eliminate all western ideals of democracy, liberty & tolerance. So, they perpetrate a provoking & spectacular criminally inhumane act of violence in hopes that our response will be to go against ourselves and our free principles by clamping down, becoming a surveillance & all controlling state that takes away all open and democratic processes (freedoms of expression, movement, responsible self-determination). We say, we do it to get them, but in fact it gets-changes us in the process. In such cases, we end up doing the bad actors' work for them. Our jerky reaction back contributes to the downward decline they desired. With my earlier example, the spider didn't hurt me; my jerking into the cabinet caused my harm. And, what had I angrily blown up at my helper? We can see how it only goes further and further downward by progressively worse unreflective reactions?

So, Jesus wants us to be aware of harms to our body, yes, but also to harms to our souls. And the greatest threat there is sin! Jesus asks us to examine how we handle sin; our own but also others' sins and our response to others' sins which brings us back to our own sins again. How I react to another's sins can add to my number of them or make mine worse! If my neighbor sins against me and I grow bitter and angry over it, notice how I've been hardened in heart because of their wrongdoing. Or if I see others' sins and injustices against the weak, and I fill up with hate, what is that doing to better anything? We don't want to turn into what we are bothered by in others. Their sins do not have to become our sins. In such cases, we prove that we are no different, have no more grace than they (and as Christians we claim to, so we have to react differently which is what Jesus is bringing up today by reminding us to 'fear what harms or changes your soul'.)

Jesus wants us to ask, "How do I react to sin; my own and others?" How do I tend to my soul, tend to my body? We likely do a good job at protecting our bodies. But what about protecting our souls? We are careful not to bring jagged rocks and throw them down onto our dining room wood finish tables or drag the dirty garden hoses across our carpeted front rooms, but do we also exercise such care about what we let roll over in our hearts or pull through our minds everyday (thoughts, images, stories- it may be crazy to really think about what we let slide into our hearts and run through our minds when we think about the pictures, movies, music, news, gossip that we are exposed to everyday in conversations, screens, or any media). So Jesus wants us to fear what can kill our souls. Anything that can deaden, desensitize or harden our souls, we need to be on guard against. Unfortunately for us, the more violence we see, the more we may accept and harden ourselves to it; maybe the more abusive language we let in, the more likely it can come out from us, too. So Jesus says, "Protect your soul", "All that you let in changes-affects you", so we need to "Watch carefully over our souls!"