

[Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4; Ps. 95; 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14; Luke 17:5-10]

I have some Sad News, some Glad News and some Happy News. The Sad News. Following a catastrophic stroke and two years of suffering and pain, Sr. Pat Whalen, our former Worship Coordinator, died last Thursday evening at Burgess Place in Kalamazoo. A Funeral Mass is planned for Tuesday, October 14 at 10:30 AM at the Congregation of St. Joseph Sisters Chapel in Kalamazoo. We are planning a Memorial Mass for Sr. Pat here at St. Martin de Porres on Thursday, October 30 at 11 AM.

The Glad News. After several weeks of going between doctor appointments, hospital stays and therapy sessions at assisted living facilities, Deacon Marion Jurewicz is still weak but on the road to recovery. He thanks you for your prayers.

Finally, the Happy News. At our St. Francis of Assisi pet blessing on Saturday, there were ten dogs and two cats along with their owners. A free will offering was taken up, and over \$100 will be donated to the Humane Society of Michigan.

Reminds me of the funniest dog/cat joke I ever heard. It seems both a dog and a cat arrived at Heaven's Pearly Gates at the same time. St. Peter, sitting on a throne, asked them to say why they deserve to get into Heaven. The dog said, "I was always faithful to my master. Every time I approached him, my tail wagged with delight. I ate whatever food he set before me. He taught me to fetch his slippers when he came home from work. At bed time, I nuzzled near his feet on the bed to keep his feet warm."

“Very good,” said St. Peter. “Come into Heaven.”

Then St. Peter turned to the cat and said, “And what have YOU got to say to get into Heaven?” The cat looked up at him and said, “You’re sitting in my chair.” Isn’t that a great joke?

“How long, O Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen! I cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not intervene. Destruction and violence are before me.”

Who is the speaker in today’s First Reading? A parent whose child is dying of cancer? A wife awaiting the return of her husband from a fourth military deployment? An elderly person who keeps reading about school or workplace shootings? A young student who is afraid that the next terrorist act is just around the corner? How safe are you and I in this church? The prophet Habakkuk wrestles with the questions of violence and injustice of his time as we lament ours.

Why does evil occur right before God’s eyes? If God cannot do anything about it, Habakkuk says, spare us who have to look at it!

Later, when God responds to the prophet’s questions, it is not with answers or solutions. It’s with a promise. A promise of deliverance and restitution. Six times after today’s First Reading excerpt, God promises that God’s vision will be fulfilled. But it will take faith and patience to reach that day. God says, wait in faith.

A few weekends ago, between the two Sunday Masses I spoke with three different parishioners who told me about their journeys to wellness.

To find the right combination of medicine, therapy and lifestyle changes took one month for one parishioner, three months for the second one, and a full three years for the third one. Maybe that’s

why the medical profession calls us “patients!” We need faith and patience in our physical lives and in our spiritual lives! It took Sr. Pat almost two years for her to finally find peace of body, mind and soul.

I had the blessing of visiting with Sr. Pat three times in those two years. The nursing staff sang her praises. One said, “We have never had a more joy-filled patient than Sr. Pat! Always smiling every day!” I said, “Are we talking about the same Sr. Pat?”

Her joy came from spending three or four hours A DAY before the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle of the Chapel there with her Divine Spouse. Sr. Pat often said, in words, similar to those of St. Carlo Acutis: “When you sit in the SUN, you get a sun tan; when you sit in front of the SON, you are on the Highway to Heaven!” I imagine that as she stood before Jesus Christ on Thursday night, she said words similar to the servants at the end of today’s Gospel: “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what we were obliged to do.” May she be at rest, a good and faithful servant and my dear friend!

In our Second Reading, St. Paul exhorts the young bishop Timothy and his people to keep the faith in the face of difficulty. Note that once again, St. Paul writes these words while sitting in a dungeon in a prison. Only the endurance of our suffering can embolden us to the point of inviting others to embrace it.

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We can become frustrated, apathetic and numb to all of this sin, this evil. We also realize that evil wins when good people do nothing. What CAN we do?

The month of October, in addition to being the month dedicated to the Most Holy Rosary, is also Respect Life Month. We are invited to pray the Rosary daily for peace. This is where we start. We pray. We reflect and think. Then we act in support of the Right to Life.

Questions for reflection this week: What circumstances in YOUR life give you that hope and confidence?

What trials have helped you grow in patience and in faith?

St. Paul tells Timothy, and he says to US: Stir into flame the gift of God. God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony as a Catholic with a well-formed and informed conscience. It's also, we might add, our joy and our pleasure. AMEN!

[Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; Ps. 34; 2 Tim.4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14]

A Pharisee and a tax collector go into the Temple to pray... Sounds like the set up for a joke, right? A priest, a rabbi and a minister walk into a pub and the bartender says, "What is this, a joke?" [Delayed pity laughter.]

I'm reminded of a performance put on by two Mennonite actors at my last parish. Following the performance, at about 9:30 PM on a Saturday night, I had to provide them with dinner at a local restaurant. Then, by about 11 PM, it was on to a recently-built motel for their lodgings, which I had arranged by phone. It was a new, clean motel, maybe six months old, and I had never been inside of it.

When we approached the motel entrance, I turned to the two men and said, "A priest and two Mennonites enter a motel..." They asked if they could put that on their blog the next morning.

When we got to the registration desk, the young, perky blonde woman, about in her early twenties, shouted, "Fr. Nick! It's so good to see you again!"

Now, it was kind of her to greet me with such enthusiasm, but the tone of her greeting was such that I thought her next line would be, "Your usual room?" Judging by the look on the faces of the two Mennonite men, they were thinking the same thing!

I asked the woman, "How do we know each other?" She said, "You were the priest when I was confirmed in the Ninth Grade!" We hadn't seen each other since then. I was off the hook, and the Mennonites went to their room!

Back to the Pharisee and the tax collector walking into the Temple. The formula would be perfect if the Pharisee and the tax collector had both gone into a bar. But of course, a Pharisee would never drink or dine in the same place as a tax collector. Just about the only place these two might meet is on the grounds of the Temple. In fact, they don't meet, in any sense of the word. The Pharisee marches up front and begins his sublime self-congratulation performed for God's benefit -- otherwise known as *his* prayer. To himself!

The tax collector stands at a distance, not eligible to enter beyond the outermost court because of his line of work, and offers his confession -- otherwise known as *his* prayer. From far off, the tax collector's mumbled words are received gladly in Heaven, while the proud announcement of the Pharisee leaves him unjustified in the eyes of God. What happened?

You can't have a conversation with someone who does all the talking. While the Pharisee behaves as if he were standing in front of a mirror, engaging in self-promotion, the tax collector in the far corner of the Temple mount is actually the one in dialogue with God. We know this because he knows enough to know he's a sinner, and not only because of his profession, but because he's a human being. It is the best and only way to come to prayer: in the spirit of humility. We are dust, *humus*, humans who come from the soil. If we know who God is -- all-powerful, all-generous, all-loving, and all-merciful -- then we must know who we are: in desperate need of all of the above!

Forty years ago, I selected today's Second Reading as the Second Reading for my own funeral liturgy, whenever that will take

place: “I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.” Between now and when I die, I now have to live up to those words! I also have recommended this reading at funerals I have celebrated here at St. Martin’s as a testimonial to the many witnesses of faith we have in this community. How many of them fought the good fight and have finished the race while keeping the faith?

So, St. Paul in his captivity as a prisoner in Rome, speaks these tender words to his protégé, the young St. Timothy that the ending of his ministry, much like the beginning of his ministry, rests on the mercy and the grace of God. The difference between St. Paul’s bragging and the Pharisee’s bragging is great. St. Paul realizes that any greatness and achievements in his ministry is because of God’s grace and God’s will welling up in him and in his ministry; the Pharisee was relying only on his own wits and counting his own accomplishments.

Today’s Gospel parable tells us that God knows us as we really are. The parable tells us that God accepts us as we are. Yet God is not angry with us. For even though God ACCEPTS us as we are, He never LEAVES us as we are. We are always encouraged and challenged to move beyond what we are and where we are.

Beyond where we have been, to something even better. This requires of us a healthy self-awareness, a healthy humility, and yes, a healthy pride about ourselves.

Reflection Questions for this week:

Think of those who are less active spiritually or religiously than you. Those people of whom you say, “Thank God I am not like

them!” Do we grieve for them because of their sins and their possible spiritual blindness? Do we do anything to help them grow closer to Christ?

And, perhaps most importantly, do they experience Jesus every time they encounter US?

One man condemns himself by his pride and another is rescued because of his humility. Let’s hold close to the prayer that saves. It is one of the oldest prayers in our Catholic tradition:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” AMEN!