



Homily for
THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
25/26 June, 2016

Fr. Dwayne's homily follows....

*"No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind
is fit for the kingdom of God."*

I. Experience of one bottom plow on the farm....

- in 1963, when I was 13, we moved to our grandfather's farm, "the home place"
- there was a one bottom plow on the farm
- I recall that as a teenager I looked at that thing and wondered how it worked: how much did they have to guide it? Did they have to lean on it?
- it looked very much like the plow on the liturgy guide
- how did they hook a horse or horses to it?
- even though I didn't understand how they used it, I can easily see that what Jesus says in the gospel is true....you can't set your hand to the plow and look back!
- if you did, the row would certainly be crooked; you can't even look side to side – you need to be very attentive, you need to stay focused: no one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God (or for plowing a field!)

II. Jesus surely uses an apt metaphor for describing what being his disciple entails:

a disciple cannot put his or her hand to the plow and then look back to what has been. Disciples must be willing – always willing – to give up distractions and anything that takes us away from being a disciple of Jesus.

Discipleship calls for total commitment – a commitment which grows and matures as we make our way through life.

III. Today is the 67th anniversary of my baptism: the day on which I became a disciple of Jesus

- of course, as an infant I had no idea of what was happening: *nevertheless the sacrament of baptism transformed me* – after baptism I would never be the same
- in time, faith would be supplied; I was nurtured in faith through my Catholic family, parents and grandparents on both sides of my family
- that nurturing was supported by the Catholic grade school where I was taught all of the essentials of the Catholic faith
- it was also in those days when I first felt the stirrings of a call to priesthood: I was inspired by the example I saw in the nuns and priests around me. *I was beginning to love Jesus.*
- in childhood I was growing as a disciple of Jesus, but all of those pieces of Catholicism really didn't come together for me until I was in college. It was in college – at Loras – in the midst of a seminary community – when I internalized all of those faith experiences from earlier years. It was in those days when the words of scripture came alive in me, “It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ Jesus. (Brothers,) I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead.”

In those days, those years of college, I was putting my hand to the plow and just *beginning* to understand the commitment this would require.

IV. Today is also the 40th anniversary of my ordination – in fact, the bishop was probably putting his hands on my head just about now.

Forty years of priesthood – in a wide variety of ministries – primarily the educational and pastoral ministry – have more clearly focused who I am as a disciple of Jesus, through the ministry of priesthood.

On the one hand I can honestly say, as it relates to my *vocational* decision, I have never looked back – I have never questioned, doubted, wondered about whether or not this is the path of discipleship I should follow. Priesthood is clearly God's vocation for me.

I can also honestly say I have always given my 100%. I have tried my best, to do my best in everything I have ever done. And I will continue to do my very best, to give it my all, until I finish plowing this field. And after all this time, there isn't much left to do; I only have a few more rounds to make....(!)

This is not to say that I think I've done everything well or perfect – that I haven't made many mistakes, exercised poor judgment, done stupid and foolish things. I know my many weaknesses. I well know other guys could have done so much better.

Keeping one's hands on the plow is more the challenge of staying focused - it's one thing not to look back; it's quite another to stay focused on looking

ahead: avoiding distractions is a continuing demand as a disciple of Jesus. I am constantly challenged to let go – to put aside distractions, any conflicting interests, evil temptations – *anything* which would take away from remaining focused on Christ and helping to build his kingdom on earth. Being a disciple of Jesus, as you know, is never easy. It is hard work!

In fact, it is a lifetime effort to remain focused on Christ.

V. In the gospel, Jesus illuminates the struggles we may have in staying focused.

Three people come to Jesus and express their desire to follow him, but Jesus tells them this will be a commitment which may require giving up a place to live; to one he says “let the dead bury the dead” and to another don’t go home to say goodbye to your family. Does he mean walk away from your family and your job and your daily responsibilities?

No. But he is pointing out there are times when we need to weigh various competing values and responsibilities. Jesus does not mean we walk away from these conflict situations, but rather *enter into them*.

For example,

- consider a teenager, a Catholic teen who is serious about faith and really wants to be a faithful disciple of Jesus...that teen is out with friends one night and the mood of the group seems to swing to doing things which are contrary to the teen’s values, which are clearly sinful and destructive. What does the teen do? Go along with the group with the hope of keeping friends or find a way to get out of the situation, risk losing friends? How does the teen keep his or her hand to the plow and stay focused?

- we face all kinds of temptations to immorality. These might be big or small, recurring or temporary, venial or mortal...but what to do when temptation comes our way! Rationalize...make excuses? Tell ourselves it's not big a deal...no one worries about sin anymore....do we just cave in? Or in that moment of temptation do we remind ourselves to stay focused, to look ahead, to not allow ourselves to be distracted by these temptations?
- imagine a family: parents with middle school or teenage children. They lobby their things, to go places, to experience things which are clearly outside the parents' vision of what they want their child to do? The children complain that other parents let their kids do that...why don't you? Do the parents back off...relent...or find a way to teach the truth of the gospel message? Do they stay focused?
- in how many ways are we challenged in our work situations to stay focused on being a disciple of Jesus...to look away from distractions...to treat co-workers with respect or disrespect...to give a full days' work for my compensation...to be ethical in my actions...to be someone who works well with others. Are you the person at work you really want to be? In what ways are you challenged to stay focused on being a disciple of Jesus?

It is in these kinds of situations when we learn

- what it means to keep our hand on the plow –
- where we are challenged to come back to plowing a straight row
- where we refuse to be distracted and look to one side or the other.

The more we can remind ourselves to do that, the straighter the row will be

and the more beautiful the plowed field will look.

Looking back into my own life... I can see the times when I was distracted: I was taken away from what I was supposed to be doing. When I stay focused the plowing goes more smoothly.

VI. In order to do this more effectively, we must always stay centered in the Lord.

A. Staying centered happens through prayer: when we have developed our personal prayer patterns: a consistent, daily pattern of prayer. For the priest that hinges on the daily prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, some time in meditation, prayerful preparation for the Mass and Mass itself.

And for each of us and all of us, it is always the Mass itself. Here in the intimacy of the Eucharist we draw close to the Lord and receive into ourselves the very Body and Blood of Christ. It is Jesus, with whom and for whom, we plow the field. May he bring the good work he has begun in us to the fullness of completion in the joys of eternal life.

Fr. Kyle's homily follows....

Not available