



Homily for
THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
13/14 August, 2016

Fr. Dwayne's homily follows....

I. Have you ever felt like Jesus? Have you ever felt like you wanted to set the earth on fire – and that you wouldn't rest until everything is ablaze? (pause) I'll bet you have.

(pause)

- if you are a grandparent who bemoans the fact that your adult children no longer practice their Catholic faith and they do not have your grandchildren baptized...anything you say to them is met with mockery and a rebuff – you'll feel like you want to light a fire someplace!
- if you are a parent who struggles with children who resist your efforts to teach them the beauty of your faith, who make silly and foolish, self-destructive decisions – and you must stand by silently and watch them suffer the consequences...you will feel like you will want to pound some sense into them
- if you are a young person – or someone of any age – trying to make sense of life, trying to find meaning in faith, trying to connect more fully with Jesus – you will wish and pray for clearer insight
- if you are any one of us – living in this world filled with sadness and tragedy, war and violence, child abuse and poverty – you will want to stand up on the rooftops and shout out for common sense! Peace! Harmony! Stop it already!

Yes, any disciple of Jesus who recognizes the beauty of God's Truth, and the sanity and order living by that Truth would bring to the world – will agonize with the heart of Jesus for what is good and true.

II. The image of Jesus in today's gospel is a bit jarring.

Typically, we image Jesus as a cuddly baby born into poverty in Bethlehem.

Or we envision Jesus as the Good Shepherd having gone out to find the lost sheep and carrying it home on his shoulders.

Or we imagine Jesus as gathering the children around him, or reaching out to the widows, or curing the blind and lame.

These are comforting images, and so the image of a frustrated Jesus, a Jesus who wants to light a fire on earth seems out of character – to say the least. But is it really? Isn't this just another side of the Heart of Mercy? Just as Jesus teaches us the truth of his word and stands in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, so too Jesus' frustration reveals his deep love for humanity – and his deep desire that we come to know and live by the truth of his word.

III. It is a truth each of us has glimpsed in some way, a truth each of us seeks to live in our personal lives, and a truth we want to share with others – a truth we know will set them free and take them down the road to happiness.

In our efforts to share our faith, we may well find that if we stick with the truth, it can be divisive. It can challenge us to stand apart – it can call us to stand up for what is right, even if it brings conflict in a family or the loss of friendship.

I recall, for example, a deacon whose daughter wanted him to help her move in with her boyfriend over the weekend. He, in good conscience, could not condone her action and could not help her move in with him. His wife, on the other hand, didn't see any particular problem and couldn't see why he would be so resistant. His standing up for what is right caused no little conflict between him and his wife and with his daughter.

IV. In this crazy world in which we live, it is very difficult to be that Christian disciple who stands up – who stands out – proclaiming in word and deed the holy and wholesome truth of God's word. If we are authentically Christian, we will face criticism and ridicule. But we should never think – or feel – we stand alone.

We should think of it, rather, as running a marathon.

Today (Sunday) the women are running for the gold in the marathon at the Olympics. And next Sunday the men will run the grueling 26.2 mile course. What is it like to run in a marathon? Your running in the marathon is preceded by months and months of relentless training. And now that training is tested in the marathon.

The race begins – but you are never alone. You are surrounded by cheering spectators – *thousands* of them – encouraging you and spurring you on to victory! Their enthusiasm causes the adrenaline to flow and you feel uplifted by them.

Perhaps our own example of a marathon – something closer to home – is

RAGBRAI. Does anyone who races in RAGBRAI ever race alone? What would it be like without a support team? What would it be like to race alone, without family

and friends to share the experience with and to support us along the way.

In some sense, those spectators – whether at the Olympics or in RAGBRAI – are racing too! We couldn't do it without them.

V. The author of the second letter to the Hebrews likens the Christian life to running in a race. “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus...”

The men's marathon of 48 years ago – the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City is memorable – not for the man who came in first, but for the man who finished last. He was John Stephen Akhwari of Tanzania. Halfway through the race, he fell and injured his leg and shoulder. But he kept running, then walking, then almost dragging his bleeding leg across the finish line hours after the others had finished. With only a few dire-hard spectators left in their seats, Akhwari limped across the finish line.

Afterwards, someone asked him why he kept going, why didn't he quit. After all, of the 75 runners that day, 18 athletes had quit – mostly because of the high altitude. Akhwari responded by saying that his country didn't send him thousands of miles to start a race: they sent him thousands of miles to *finish* the race.

VI. *By virtue of our baptism, we are commissioned to not just start the race of Christian life, but we are called to finish it.*

In the midst of trying to teach our children, young and adult; amidst the challenges

of so many distractions which try to divert our attention and take our energy; in a world filled with misery and despair, we are called to be a people of hope. We are called to persevere and finish the race.

We do that by reminding ourselves that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Those witnesses are the saints, and our own family and friends, who have gone before us. But they are not witnesses like spectators in an arena – simply watching and cheering. They are witnesses in the sense that they have *already done it*. They have persevered to the end. They did not give up. They are our inspiration.

And we finish the race by keeping our eyes fixed on the finish line. Just as Jesus kept his eyes fixed on “the joy that lay before him,” so too must we cast aside any sin and all distraction so that we share in the crown of glory with him.

We renew ourselves now in this Eucharist, focused on the finish line, where Jesus himself will greet us with open arms.