

Today's homily reflects on today's scriptures, unpacks the core message in the 2nd chapter of Pope Francis' latest Apostolic Exhortation, "Rejoice and be Glad", explores ways for us to apply that message in our daily lives, and then speaks about Chalice, the largest Canadian Catholic sponsorship organization.

SCRIPTURES

About 750 years before Jesus came into the world, the prophet Isaiah wrote to the poor exiles that all creation will see God's glory and those who are blind, deaf, lame and mute will be relieved of their limitations. We hear, "... the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute shall sing for joy."

Some seven centuries later Jesus touched a man who could not hear and had a speech impediment, and immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly, as we heard in the Gospel. This is one example – among many – of what had been foretold by the prophets was fulfilled through Jesus.

The reading we heard from the letter from James invites us ask the soul-searching question, "Do we treat the poor as being equal to us and to others?" In a few moments, when we turn to Chalice, we will have an opportunity to demonstrate our care for poor children in a concrete way.

CHAPTER 2

Last week Fr. Dominic announced that, in September, we will be preaching on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, Rejoice and Be Glad, one chapter each weekend. In this, Pope Francis invites us to be **holy**, in other words, to be **saints**. He does this by helping us understand what holiness is, and what it isn't, what it practically looks and feels like in everyday life, along with practical advice on living it.

Fr. Dominic started us off by sharing what holiness is and why it matters as we discern God's vision for the future of our parish. And he invited us to think about what might cause us to fear holiness. Today, I will unpack what holiness **ISN'T**.

Chapter 2 is titled: "**TWO SUBTLE ENEMIES OF HOLINESS**".

Pope Francis writes of two false forms of holiness that can lead us astray. They are heresies from early Christian times, yet they continue to plague us. They are known as: "Gnosticism" and "pelagianism". Many Christians today, without even realizing it, can be seduced by these seductive ideas that are disguised as Catholic truth, but they are not Catholic truth; they are evil, give rise to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, and lead one not closer to but farther away from God. As Pope Francis writes, "... one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others."

GNOSTICISM

In the pitfall of Gnosticism one is concerned with one's knowledge, education and reason, ultimately keeping one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.

Gnosticism leads people to become so focussed on what they know that they take on a disembodied spirituality. They are false prophets who use religion for their own purposes, to promote their own psychological or intellectual theories. Gnostics are blind to the Jesus who lived, loved, cried, taught, suffered and died before his resurrection, and those who fall into that sinister trap unknowingly deny the Jesus who gave and continues to give himself to us in the Eucharist.

Reflecting on this, one is reminded of the serpent in the garden, the devil, tempting the woman to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and thereby disobeying God, bringing death into the world.

One is also reminded that Jesus did not say, “Let those know-it-all’s, who think they are experts about God, the Pharisees, come to me.” No. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” (Mark 10:14). Therefore, it is worth reminding oneself that children believe in God and love our Lord without needing proof or reason or logic or theological degrees.

“Saint John Paul II warned of the temptation on the part of those in the Church who are more highly educated ‘to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful.’”

Pope Francis points out that “Thanks be to God, throughout the history of the Church it has always been clear that a person’s perfection is measured not by the information or knowledge they possess, but by the depth of their charity”. As you will soon hear, through Chalice sponsorships, you will be helping desperate children, their families and the entire community. This is the kind of charity Pope Francis speaks so strongly of.

PELAGIANISM

Pelagianism is concerned with willpower. Pope Francis wrote, “Those who yield to this pelagian ... mindset, even though they speak warmly of God’s grace, ‘ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style’”. “The Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative.”

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church also reminds us that the gift of grace ‘surpasses the power of human intellect and will ...’”

Pope Francis wrote that Pelagianism finds expression in a variety of apparently unconnected ways of thinking and acting, including an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for Church liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfillment.”

Pope Francis asks us to keep reminding ourselves that there is a hierarchy of theological virtues and “At the center is charity”. He quoted Galatians, “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asked a lawyer who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He answered correctly, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Showing mercy is a path to holiness, to being “saints next door” in Pope Francis’ words.

NEXT WEEK

Now that you better understand what holiness is and what holiness isn’t, in next week’s homily Deacon Mike Walsh will unpack chapter three, titled “IN THE LIGHT OF THE MASTER”, describing what holiness looks and feels like in everyday life through the lens of the beatitudes.

CHALICE

This brings us back to Chalice and sponsoring children in desperate need.

You might ask, “How big *is* the problem of children living in extreme poverty?” It is staggering. With the world’s attention focused on politics and current events, what we don’t hear is that between 200 and 300,00 children in Ukraine have been abandoned because their parents cannot feed them. The United Nations reported that about 400 million children around the world go to sleep hungry each day. And hunger is not their only problem. They don’t have adequate medical and dental care and many children live in places we wouldn’t want our pets to stay in. In many sponsorship locations, there is no electricity ever, no running water, no toilets, no beds. These children have few educational opportunities and their futures are bleak to say the least. 400 million children.

If there were only 40 or 400 desperate children you and I would line up to help. But *400 million* children? That number overwhelms me and we might be tempted to think that we can't make a difference. But that is wrong. Because we can make a difference. People just like you make a wonderful difference.

Chalice started in Springhill, Nova Scotia by a Catholic priest, and it now brings the face of Christ and hope to over 50,000 children and elderly most in need in 15 developing countries.

A question we often get asked is, "So how much of the money actually goes to the child?"

We are happy to show you our latest financial report because it shows you that we don't waste your money. MoneySense magazine independently grades the biggest 100 charities to help donors make smart giving decisions. For the last 8 years, Chalice has again received the highest rating given to any international aid organization because over 90% of the funds collected go directly toward the child, family and the communities through our Catholic missionaries. Your donations are 100% tax deductible and your tax slips will be mailed out in February.

If you are wondering how much sponsorship costs, it is only \$37.00 per month – about the cost of a chocolate bar a day.

After Mass we will have folders for children in the front lobby. Here is an example of a folder. On the left you see the photo and beside it is a brief story giving the name, birthdate, location and so on. In this example, the young (boy's/girl's) name is _____

Sponsorship helps in five key areas: Education, Nutrition, Health & Hygiene, Family Development and Community Development. Last year 99.7% of sponsored children were in school getting a good education, 100% have access to health care, 33,441 children received at least 1 nutritious meal each day, 38,101 children accessed Chalice skills development programs, 153 water projects were completed, 34 schools were built or repaired, 410 houses were built,

39 children with urgent, medical needs received the care they needed, and \$782,791 in disaster relief was provided to communities. All that is because of people just like you at St. Patrick's.

There are so many success stories over the years of sponsored kids continuing their education and becoming doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers.

Come and look at their pictures, and read the stories even if you are just thinking of sponsoring. We don't need anything today but perhaps you will find it within your heart to take one or more home with you. Please see our volunteers and me before taking any folders home.

St. Patrick's parishioners now sponsor 72 of children and I say to you, God bless you! I ask you to continue the good work you are doing and, if possible, please consider sponsoring 1 or 2 more children as you have already nobly done. If you do not already sponsor a child, this is your chance to really help a needy child of God today.

You may have heard that Pope Francis is re-igniting interest in helping the poor, both inside the Church and among non-Catholics alike. In his book, "The Joy of the Gospel", he wrote:

"Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully part of society. This demands that we be attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid. ... The old question always returns: 'How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?'" (1 John 3.17)

Here in St. Patrick's we are on holy ground. With God's help, we are people of faith, people of compassion, and we are people of prayer. Pope Francis said, "You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That's how prayer works."

After Mass, please do not turn a blind eye to the poor. Show your mercy. Please come to the table, look at the children's photos, and read their stories. Please be the disciple of Jesus these children are praying for today.