

## 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—Year A—February 5, 2017

01. Before I entered the seminary, some of you may know that I worked as a sacristan at St. Michael's Cathedral downtown. As a sacristan I was responsible for coordinating the various liturgies at the Cathedral — by making sure everything needed for the liturgy was in place beforehand — by assisting the priests during the liturgy itself — and by supervising and coordinating the various volunteers **servicing the liturgy**.
02. As the sacristan, if we were short volunteers, it was my job to fill in for them. For instance, if we were short Eucharistic ministers, I would have to serve as a Eucharistic minister and give out Communion — if we were short altar servers, I would have to fill in for whatever altar servers we were missing and help serve the Mass as well.
03. One summer, **on a very hot Sunday**, we were short altar servers — and I had to help serve one of the Masses by filling the role of book-bearer. Here at St. Patrick's we have a stand for the book where the priest sits — but at the Cathedral, it's the altar servers who hold the book for the priests. And so, as the book bearer, I had to bring the book **up to the priest for the opening and closing prayer**—as well as for the creed and the prayers of the faithful.
04. **At this one particular Mass**, I had brought the book up for the opening prayer—and then waited off to the side with the regular altar servers until the end of the homily (when I would be needed again to bring the book to the priest for the creed and the prayers of the faithful). The place where I was seated, and waiting with the altar servers, was off to the side of the altar — but was still in plain view for many people in the congregation to see me.
05. After the homily, the priest **returned to his chair, stood up, and waited for me to bring the book for the recitation of the creed** — and for some reason I didn't come. At this point everyone was also standing and waiting for me to bring the book — but still I didn't come. The priest waited, and waited, and looked around at me — **and still, I wouldn't come**.
06. Finally, the priest left his chair and went over to where I was sitting. He then tapped me on the shoulder and said: “**...we are all waiting for you.**” Basically, what had happened was, during the homily, **I had fallen soundly asleep** — and now everyone in the congregation, including the choir school boys, the other volunteers, and the altar servers **could PLAINLY see that**. My

eyes opened to find everyone staring at me—snickering and smiling with amusement.

07. It was extremely embarrassing to say the least — I definitely wanted to hide under a bushel basket. Especially since **I STILL had to bring the book to the priest** while everyone was staring at me—knowing that I was basically asleep during the **entire homily**.
08. All the volunteers, especially the altar servers, never let me live it down. I tried to cover by saying that I was deep in prayer and meditation — **but no one bought it**. Everyone knew that I wasn't holy enough for that to be true.
09. The reason I share this **very embarrassing story is that**, like many of us, I like to present the best image of myself to the world. I don't like to show **ANY limitations in my person—and any defects in my character**. And I spend a lot of energy trying to conceal or compensate for my flaws — and I find it embarrassing when any of **my limitations, my defects, my weaknesses, or my struggles are exposed**. Because my natural tendency is to try to hide these things **from others, from myself, and even from God**.
10. But what I've come to realize over time is that my **limitations, my defects, my weaknesses and struggles** are part of the lamp that Christ is talking about in today's Gospel—a lamp that should not be hidden under a basket. Because our weaknesses and struggles witness to the power of God **FAR more than our strengths do**. For Christ works best with weakness — **there's little He can do with strength**.
11. And being out of touch with our weaknesses and our issues — or pretending they're not there — or not being honest with ourselves, with others, and with God about them — or trying to mask them with **external piety, and religious fervour, like the Pharisees**—only serves to keep them hidden—and maintain their power to enslave us.
12. Of course, this doesn't mean that we should go around parading all our dirty laundry to everyone we meet. But it does mean that we need to embrace our weaknesses and limitations — and that we need to be in touch with our poverty and our defects — **bringing them out into the light when necessary** — allowing God's power to touch them, to heal them, to transform them — **and even to use them to reflect His glory to others**.
13. While in the seminary, my discernment process was not only about trying to figure out whether or not I was called to the priesthood — it was also about reconciling the reality of who I am as a **broken, wounded, sinful**

**person (struggling to live a life of grace)**—with the awesome privilege and power of the priesthood. I would look at those two images—the darkness of my imperfections, and the holiness of the priesthood—and have trouble reconciling them.

14. It was even more troubling because I really believed that I should have already conquered **all these defects of character** by the time I entered the seminary. And it was discouraging to think that I was still struggling with a lot of the same things I did 10 years before.
15. But, eventually, Christ revealed to me that the gift of my **flawed, wounded humanity** is exactly what I need to **bring to the priesthood** — and that my flawed and wounded humanity is an important part of that lamp that should not be hidden under a basket—an important part of my call to the priesthood. In other words, Christ did not call me to the priesthood **in spite of my defects of character — but, in many ways, because of them.**
16. Because Christ is not interested in how well we can conform to what others expect of us — or how good an image of ourselves we can present to others. Christ is **ONLY** interested in **WHO WE ARE** — which includes **all our baggage, all our issues, and all our flaws.** Because, again, **our faults and failings** testify to God’s power and grace **far more than our strengths do.**
17. And so, the gift of my person, which includes **my unique struggles and weaknesses** — **is the very vehicle** through which the power of God can be reflected — both through my humanity **with all its limitations,** and through my priesthood **with all its imperfections.**
18. As embarrassing as that experience was at the Cathedral — it revealed my humanity and its limitations — and there's no really no shame in that — and no reason to hide under a basket. Because even with the best of intentions, our human nature can fall short from the ideal — and this is part of what it means to be human. And, in an paradoxical way, this is part of how we give glory to God — by letting **our humanity, our vulnerability, and our weaknesses** shine just as much as our strengths and gifts.
19. The world is obsessed with **strength, power and control.** But as Disciples of Christ, **our strength** is being aware of our weaknesses, **and embracing them** — allowing the power of God to redeem them and transform them — knowing that God loves us in spite of them, **and even because of them** — believing that God embraces them wholeheartedly—and that He works with them, and through them, to reveal His glory.

20. Christ did not shy away from human limitations and weakness — He didn't just touch them from a nice, safe distance — **He embraced them wholeheartedly.** He **embraced them, owned them, and became one with them** — and in so doing **He transformed them** — so that our weakness now becomes our strength — our poverty now becomes our wealth — and our darkness, now becomes our light—light bright enough to illuminate the entire world—a world that **desperately needs light.**
21. For there's certainly been a lot of darkness in the world of late — even within our own borders—as last Sunday we witnessed the worst of humanity in the province of Quebec. But it's in the midst **of this incredible darkness,** that we also see **humanity shine the brightest** — as we see the **love, the compassion, and the empathy of Canadians** (from all kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds) pour over the wounds of the Muslim community.
22. It's unfortunate that it takes **such darkness to reveal such light** — but at the same time, light shines brightest in the midst of darkness — and, especially, **GOD'S light** shines most brilliantly in the midst of **HUMAN darkness** — just as God's power shines brightest in the midst of human weakness.
23. The greatest, and most powerful movie (by far), that I have ever seen is Steven Spielberg's masterpiece, *Schindler's List*. One of the many things I love about this film is that it shows us how even in the **unimaginable darkness of the holocaust,** God found a way to shine — as God's Light shines through the failings and weaknesses of a German businessman and opportunist — a man who at first set out to exploit Jewish prisoners, and then ended up saving their lives.
24. To those who knew Oscar Schindler, it was a complete mystery as to why he had such a change of heart, and why he went through such great lengths to save the lives of more than 1100 Jews. I'm sure it might have **even been a mystery to Schindler himself.** But it wasn't through Schindler's virtues, which were considerably lacking, that God chose to shine so brilliantly in the unspeakable darkness of the holocaust — it was through Schindler's weaknesses, flaws, and limitations.
25. And so, on this, the 5<sup>TH</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time—Our Lord is telling us: **It's okay NOT to be perfect—it's okay to have weaknesses and flaws.** And today Our Lord invites us to embrace our humanity—to own our limitations and imperfections — not hiding them under a bushel basket—or denying

that they exist—wasting time and energy trying to conceal them from others, **and from ourselves** — but allowing EVEN our weaknesses, our poverty, and our flaws to shine — because it is through them that **God’s love, God’s strength, and God’s light** shines most brilliantly—conquering the hatred, the fear, and the darkness of the world. **Amen.**