

Homily For Tuesday of the 2nd Week of in Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - January 17, 2023

(St. Anthony, Abbot)

Hebrews 6:105-20 "God guaranteed by an oath that we might seize the hope set before us."

Psalm : "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart in the congregation."

Mark 2:23-28 "The Son of Man is lord, even of the Sabbath. "

Well I Did It

Introduction

Street hockey was very big on my street. With no video games to draw us into lazy distraction, competition was very high and no one wanted to stop. We lived on a through street so there were cars, but players and drivers alike understood the rules. Every single kid had the responsibility to shout "CAR" and to move the nets to the side while it past, then immediately back to the game. The rules were clear. The one with the ball on his stick had to stop. No continuing while the game was suspended. Whole summers and countless evening hours were spent this way with kids of different ages. Despite so many hours, one incident stands out for me. It was a life lesson. I had a breakaway and was intent on scoring. Quite suddenly, my feet were pulled out from under me and down I went. I don't even remember whether I was hurt. My outrage was greater than any scraped knee. I jumped up and turned around to see Paul Haynes from two doors down, a year or two older than me, taking the ball. I shouted with all I had: "You can't do that!" With no hesitation as he ran past me, he very calmly with no apology said: "Well, I did it!" Maybe ten years old, it hit me with a lesson I have never forgotten in 60 years that the world often works by the rules of the stronger. What I meant was that he shouldn't do what he did. What he meant was that he could do whatever was made possible by his superior strength and desire. In that moment, he knew that I knew this new truth. And I knew that he knew that I had learned something new. What did I do with this new knowledge? I just went back to playing the game. No further thought was needed.

Mark

Now what's my point here? As I considered the last three weekday Gospel passages from Mark, this same story is playing out as another profound new insight, not of having to accept the way of the world, but of tremendous Good News. On Friday last, Jesus forgave a paralytic's sins. They said to him: "You can't do that. Only God can forgive sins." Jesus said, not to prove his superiority but to demonstrate God's merciful presence: Well, I did it! To emphasize his defiance, he went on to physically heal the paralytic. In yesterday's passage, Mark tells of the disciples of Jesus not fasting. They said to him: You can't do that. Moses commanded a ritual. Jesus answered: Well, they don't fast and I approve. Now we have today's passage. Jesus' permitted the disciples to pluck grain to eat. They shouted to him: You can't do that. It's against the rules to harvest on the Sabbath. Jesus responded with essentially what the neighbour kid said to me: Well, we did it. Spoiler alert: It happens again in tomorrow's Gospel account.

If it was only about Jesus defying their narrow and unjust interpretation of the law, we could cheer for him against their hard heartedness. We could identify with the winner of those particular battles. God is stronger and can take what he wants by force of will working in Jesus the Second Person of the Trinity. We won't see that use of force until Jesus is raised from the dead. That's when he will answer Satan who says: You can't come back to life. I killed you. Then, Jesus will turn to Satan with almighty power and say: Well, I did it! And that will be Good News indeed.

But that is not what happens in these early chapters of Mark's account of the Good News. His account is revealing the presence among humans of the life giving presence of God, the fullness of the promise. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that God made a promise to Abraham. That promise is called an 'oath'. God swears an oath that he will bless all the nations. Do you know what the word 'oath' is in Latin? It is a 'sacramentum'. In the sacraments, we see God acting, in Jesus, by the power of the spirit. The sacraments are God's answer when the world says: You can't wash away sin by the pouring of water. You can't transform bread and wine into body and blood of Jesus who gives himself for our salvation.

You can't. I won't hear of it. And God makes an oath saying: I can do it. I will do it. I did do it.

How does Jesus respond when they say: You can't do that? Regarding the paralytic Jesus doesn't just say: Well I did it. He says: So that you will know the Son of Man (the Messiah of God) has power to forgive sins, I say to the paralyzed "Get up and walk." Regarding fasting, Jesus says: No one fasts when the bridegroom is present. I am the divine bridegroom who calls the people of the world to be his beloved bride. Regarding plucking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus says: I made the Sabbath. I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I am the Sabbath by whom all people will be invited into God's rest.

St. Anthony of the Desert

Can you imagine how many people said to St. Anthony in the middle of the 3rd century: You can't just go out into the wilderness and live with the animals and live on nothing. You can't become a virtuous man by denying yourself every comfort and support of others. Well, we honour St. Anthony because, by his life he said: Well, I did it. But not of my own power but by the grace of God. St. Anthony says this: "One should not say that it is impossible to reach a virtuous life; but one should say that it is not easy. Nor do those who have reached it find it easy to maintain." Yet he did it. And, he invited others to do that very thing with him. He began the great tradition of the desert fathers, and the wisdom we have from them is very great.

The story of his life was written by St. Athanasius of Alexandria. After the death of his parents, Anthony desired to conform himself to the manner of life of the Apostles and early Christians. On hearing these words from the Gospel of Matthew in church, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me," St. Anthony left everything behind to live a life of prayer, fasting, self-denial, and labor. Whenever he heard of other holy people living in this manner, he would visit them to learn from their virtues in order to imitate them. He left his hermitage once to encourage persecuted Christians, and another time to support

Pope Athanasius against the heresy of Arius. St. Anthony died at the age of one hundred and five. Even today, we might say: You can't do that.

Call To Conversion

Brothers and sisters, the world is telling us today: You can't practice your Christian faith. We can say every time we hear that, not out of any personal power or strength, but of the Holy Spirit giving us power to live a holy life: Well, I did it!

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *The just will flourish like the palm tree, planted in the house of the Lord.*

Collect: *O God, who brought St. Anthony to serve you by a wondrous way of life in the desert, grant through his intercession that, denying ourselves, we may always love you above all things.*

Hebrews: *Brothers and sisters, God is not unjust. He will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints. Become imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. God made a promise to Abraham. He swore by himself, saying: "I will surely bless you and multiply you." God guaranteed by an oath that we might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us, a hope that enters the inner shrine where Jesus has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

Psalms: *I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the congregation. He sent redemption to his people. Holy and awesome is his name.*

Mark: *Jesus' disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said: "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus said to them: "Have you never read what David did? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests, and gave some to his companions. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.*