

Homily for October 25, 2019
29th Week of Ordinary Time
Friday

About a year ago I was driving up to Church for Sunday Mass and noticed a police car behind me with the lights flashing. I thought it would be a good thing to pull over because it seems the officer was wanting my attention. It turned out that a couple of blocks before I had come to a rolling stop. When the police officer approached me, he asked where I was going. I said: "I'm a Catholic Priest and I'm going to Church for Mass". He then said: "That is important work to do at a time like this. I am going to let you go without a ticket, but that road violation warrants a \$300.00 fine". Needless to say, I was very thankful for the forgiveness of this officer and that encounter has influenced the way I drive. Before being pulled over I knew that I am required to come to a full stop before that red sign. But in a way I knew it intellectually but not so much in my heart. Since that day I have become much more attentive at stop signs. I come to a complete stop but have also noticed how common it is for people to come only to a rolling stop.

I have in other words experienced a conversion in how drive because of that experience in October 2018. In today's readings there is also the theme of conversion to live more attentively to the signs of God's presence in our lives. In the reading from Romans, Paul so to speak is like the person who wants to be a better driver but repeatedly gets pulled over. The very good that he wants to do, he does not do and the bad he does not want to do he does.

When people come for Confession this is a passage I often turn to. Conversion which is a deepening holiness is not something that is easy for us. We often bring the same sins before the Lord time and again in Confession. But like Paul that we have one who is even more forgiving than the police officer who showed me mercy. Paul's passionate words are ones spoken by the Church's foremost New Testament writer and Missionary Apostle:

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Paul refers to the influence of sin as a body of death. The ancient Roman Emperors were renowned for their ability to think up hideous forms of punishment. All of us are familiar with the fact that crucifixion was one such form of punishment. But there was another - that of binding the corpse of a murder victim to the back of the murderer! Under penalty of death, no one was allowed to remove the corpse from the body of the condemned person – which result in the death of the condemned man.

The words of Paul in this passage bring to mind this gruesome practice of carrying around a 'dead body', much like a man condemned. It's as if Paul felt that something dead was strapped to him and accompanied him wherever he went. We know he did not mean this literally! So what was he trying to say?

He is expressing the deep desire to be freed from sin and to be converted more deeply to Christ. It is Christ who alone can cut us free of the dead man so we can be liberated and freed to live

with greater meaning and purpose. One of the things I like to ask people at Confession is does the power of the sin you continue to confess have the same hold on you know that it did, say two years ago. They often say it has loosened. As we continue to live in this world we long to be brought into the greater liberty of the sons and daughters of God.

May we never give up desiring deeper transformation in Christ as we pray for Jesus to teach us his ways so that with today's Psalmist we may sing out:

*I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life.
⁹⁴ I am yours; save me,
for I have sought your precepts.¹*

Just as I am a better driver because of my needing to admit my carelessness at stop signs so we can come to deeper conversion as we acknowledge with Paul the desire for deeper conversion and so discover the mercy of Jesus as we are attentive to his presence in our daily lives.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 119:93–94). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.