

Homily for 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Why? I wonder how much time and energy we spend asking that very simple question. Why can't I have what other people have? Why did God make me the way I am? Why don't I have the opportunities that everyone else seems to get? Why do I have to deal with serious illness? Why does someone I love have to be sick? Why don't I have more friends? Why don't I have more financial resources? Why can't I find someone to love? Why don't my children act better? Why don't my parents leave me alone? Why? Why? Why?

And the curse of the "why" question is that it paralyzes us and makes us forget to ask the more important question: What? What am I going to do? What are the things that I want to go after in life? And most importantly: What is God asking me to do and accomplish? And because we don't ask the "what" question and just concentrate on the "why" question, we become trapped in a mire of feelings that can imprison us.

You see, the problem with the "why" question is that it goes nowhere except to bring us to a never ending well of pity and self-absorption. It becomes a way for us to look out instead of looking in...to become envious of others instead of finding within ourselves the strength to be for others instead of being for ourselves..

While the annals of history are packed with people who get stuck on the why question and never seem to accomplish very much either personally or professionally, history also has a treasure chest of people who stopped asking “why” and learned to ask “what”. And that made all the difference.

Consider Helen Keller...deaf and blind and trapped in a world of utter silence...the why of self-pity was left behind and the what became the driving force of her life.

He was raised in abject poverty. He would never be described as handsome or engaging. His academic credentials were non-existent. Yet Abraham Lincoln is considered to be the finest president our country has ever known.

Let them be born black in a society filled with racial discrimination where front doors were closed to them and you have Booker T. Washington, Marian Anderson, George Washington Carver or Martin Luther King, Jr.

Let him be born of parents who survived a Nazi concentration camp and then paralyze him from the waist down and you have the incomparable concert violinist, Itzhak Perlman.

Did any of these people spend their lives asking “why”.....I doubt it.

Jesus in today's gospel says: "Take up your cross." He might just as well have said "Don't wallow in self-pity." And after you learn to embrace that cross and walk through it instead of letting it nail you down, then "follow" Christ. Let Him become the strength upon which you build your life. Let Christ teach us how to live our lives. Let Christ show us how God's love can become "a fire burning in our hearts and imprisoned in our bones." And let God's grace teach us to never be afraid, to never be dominated by the "whys" but rather filled with the courage to simply ask "what"....What, Lord, do you want me to do? What should I do with my life? And then give us the courage to do it.