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Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey
5th Sunday of Easter – Year C
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Gospel: John 13: 31-35

Saint Philip Neri once said, “Excessive sadness seldom springs from any other source than pride.”¹ Today, I would like to meditate on three sins. Three sins that lead to pride. Three sins that lead to excessive sadness. Three sins that prevent us from experiencing the joy of the Gospel and the joy of the Easter season.

The first sin I would like to talk about is the sin of lukewarmness. We all know what it feels like to be passionate for the faith. We all know what it feels like to be on fire with the Holy Spirit. But sadly, we also all know what it is like when we are not. We all know what it is feels like to be lukewarm.

Growing up, I knew a priest who once said that you can never take a vacation from your vocation. It is easy to see how that quote works for the vocation of marriage or the priesthood. We all know that when we go out of town, we cannot simply ignore our vows. But our vocation is not simply limited to our state in life. We all have a deeper vocation. We all have the vocation to holiness. And I think we often times do try to take vacations from that.

Every day Christ gives us countless opportunities to grow in holiness. Countless opportunities to keep the fire of faith burning hot. But we rarely take those opportunities. We usually ignore. We like to cut corners and take the easy way out. We like our comfort, and we make compromises. And when we do that, we become lukewarm.

¹ Maxims and Sayings of Saint Philip Neri, April 24th

The answer to the sin of lukewarmness is in today's first reading: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God."² If we do not humbly confront the hardships of life, then Christ cannot help us grow. If we lukewarmly avoid hardship, then we become prideful and prefer the life we create for ourselves over the life God creates for us. And our when our prideful plans do not pan out because they never do, we experience sadness, excessive sadness.

The second sin is the sin of stubbornness. Today's second reading says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, for the old order has passed away. Behold, I make all things new."³ Stubbornness is the sin that prevents God from wiping away our tears and making us new. When confronting the failures of life, the failures of our plans, we often times refuse to accept what God is offering us.

I have heard it so many times before: "Life is unfair." "My life did not turn out the way I planned. Why did I not get the life that I wanted, the life I dreamed of?" Or the worst: "Why didn't I get the life that I deserve?"

I asked myself all those questions when I was a young monk. And I shared those frustrations and resentments with a priest. And that priest told me that I had built a wall.

I think that is what all of us do. We build walls with our stubbornness. It is strange but true. We sometimes like to hold onto our anger. Hold onto our bitterness and resentment. Hold onto our tears. Rather than let God take them away. We know it is lie. But we trick ourselves into thinking that being stubborn, that building walls, that having a hard heart is better than the alternative. We trick ourselves into thinking it is better than surrendering to Christ.

² Acts 14:22

³ Rev 21:5

But if we never surrender to Christ and let him take our tears away and make us new, then we just sit there alone. Behind the walls that we have built. We just sit there stubbornly. Covered in our tears. We just sit there with our sadness, our excessive sadness.

The third sin is the sin of self-centeredness. I find the first line of today's Gospel to be particularly striking, "When Judas had left them, Jesus said..."⁴ Today's Gospel begins with Judas walking out on Christ and the other disciples. Today's Gospel begins with Judas become self-centered rather than Christ-centered.

There is one priest I know who is famous for his ability to understand people and explain their lives to them and solve all their problems. When I was in school, I would visit this wise priest on a regular basis, hoping that he would explain my life to me.

However, when I would go in for my meetings, we would never talk about me. I felt like we would talk about everyone else in the world other than me. He would tell me to pray for this person and to pray for that person. He would tell me about this one priest who is working too hard. And how we need to make sure he takes a break. And he would tell me about this other priest who seems a bit down. And how we need to try and encourage him.

For a while, I pridefully thought that I was the one mystery that this wise priest could not solve. The one person whose life he could not explain. But I finally asked him, "Why is that whenever we have meetings, we never talk about me? Why is it that you have never explained my life to me like you do with everyone else?"

And that wise priest responded, "My dear Father Philip, we never talk about you because you do better when you think of others rather than yourself."

⁴ Jn 13:31

I think that advice can be applied to all of us. All of us have moments when we think too much about ourselves. All of us have moments when we walk out on Jesus and his disciples, like Judas did in today's Gospel. All of us have moments of self-centeredness when we get so wrapped up in our own problems, our own worries, our own concerns. And we forget about everything else except our own sadness, our excessive sadness.

The answer to the sin of self-centeredness and the other two sins I have mentioned before. The answer can be found at the heart of today's Gospel, in Christ's new commandment: "As I have loved you, so you should love one another."

We get so wrapped up in our own hardships. That we forget that other people have hardships too. And Christ has called us out of our lukewarmness to help others undergo their hardships. We get so wrapped up in our own tears. That we forget that other people have tears too. And Christ has called us out of our stubbornness to help Him wipe those tears away. We get so wrapped up in ourselves. That we forget that there are other people. And Christ has called us out of our self-centeredness to love them as He has loved us.

And so think of one way you are lukewarm and take a vacation from the path of holiness. And stop it. Think of one way you are stubborn and build up walls. And stop it. Think of one way you are self-centered and think only of yourself. And stop it.

Saint Philip Neri once said, "Excessive sadness seldom springs from any other source than pride." If we never take a vacation from holiness, but rather undergo many hardships for ourselves and for others. If we never build up walls, but rather allow God to wipe every tear from our eyes and help Him wipe tears from others' eyes. If we do better and think of others rather than ourselves and love one another as Christ has loved us.

If we do those three things, we will be humble. We will be emptied of our pride. We will be emptied of our excessive sadness. And then we finally can be filled with the joy of the Gospel, the joy of the Easter season.

Amen.