

Graduation Homily – Bro. August Schaefer OSB
5/13/2017

Acts 6: 1-7, Ps 33, 1 Pt 2: 4-9, Jn 14: 1-12

This gospel is so relevant to us today. It's relevant to us all, as of course, all the gospels are. This is, I believe the first written account of a Catholic School Teacher dealing with Senioritis. "Philip, Thomas, really? Have you been in this class all this time and you still ask this?" So, fellow faculty, even Jesus had to deal with this...

Alright, no more talk about Senioritis—and actually you guys weren't that bad. But these readings **are** very important for us today, so I'm going to do something I normally don't do in a homily and use a visual aid. I want you guys to understand one of the things I've been yelling at you most of the year. No, it's not "Don't be racist." Even though, that's very important and we'll get to that soon. I think most of you will recognize this wheelchair that's been down in the crypt all year. I hope that you remember whenever I would see you sitting in and wheeling yourselves around, I would remind you loudly that "That's not a toy!" To me this wheelchair has sacramental weight. Which means, when I see this wheelchair, I see much more than simply a mobility aid. First and foremost, this wheelchair symbolizes my Uncle Bob. My dad had one sibling and that was his older brother Bob, my uncle. As a child, Bob contracted Polio and spent the rest of his life using a

wheelchair like this one to get around. He never married and lived with my Grandparents his whole life. Polio affected his body not his mind, and my grandparents worked hard to make sure he was able to go to school and get an education. Which wasn't easy because the school buildings much like ours had lots of stairs and no elevators at the time. But Uncle Bob got his degree and became an accountant. By the time I was born he became co-owner with a friend of a Ford car dealership in a small town north of Sioux Falls. He was able to drive himself to and from work and have a pretty normal adult life.

Normal except for one thing. He was not able to go to church on his own. He simply couldn't get into the Cathedral in Sioux Falls where our family attended mass. Every entrance had stairs leading up to it. So, each Sunday, my parents would get our family ready for church and leave early enough to stop at my grandparents' house so we could all arrive at the church at the same time and then my Dad would pull my Uncle Bob up the seven or eight steps needed to get into the church. My sister, brothers, and I would hold open the doors—there were no automatic doors at that time. The American's with Disabilities Act was not passed into law until 1990 and by that time my Uncle Bob had been dead for 10 years.

I tell you all this because I want you to know that my experience of church growing up was that of having our family fractured. Because when we got into the church itself, we would have to park my Uncle in the back and go find a pew

someplace else. Unless we were lucky enough to arrive early enough to find the back pew empty—which as most of you know never happens in a Catholic church, and which was virtually impossible for us with four small children. I was never able to sit with my Uncle at mass. When it came time for the kiss of peace, my siblings and I would crawl out of the pew and march back to where our Uncle was and give him the kiss of peace.

Now when I go to church with my parents we still go to the Cathedral, but it's a different experience. There's a ramp leading up to the door. No stairs. Buttons are available so that the doors will open for you. People in wheelchairs can now at least get into the church on their own. Unfortunately, in the recent renovation they took out the pew that was designed that so that people in wheelchairs could sit with their families and spouses. So still not perfect.

OK, what does this all have to do with our readings and with you. First, Jesus in the gospel says that he is preparing rooms for each of us in His Father's house, but for some people—like my Uncle Bob—it was impossible to enter into God's house here on Earth. The church on earth, the Body of Christ, is broken. Peter in the second reading tells us that Christ, "The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone, and A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall.” What makes the Body of Christ stumble and fall is our own stony hearts that are hardened rocks that blind us to the needs of others.

Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus has said that whatever you do to the least of these you do to me. So today when Jesus asks us as he asked Phillip, “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me,” He’s asking us when are we going to see the face of God in those who are outcast and the excluded? I’ve given you a recent example of the church not seeing Christ in everyone, but it’s been with us for a very long time. Today’s story from the Acts of the Apostles points to effects of racism. In heaven the banquet is open to all, but on earth the widows and orphans who are of Greek descent are excluded. Don’t be racist.

We are on a pilgrim journey to the Father’s house and the heavenly banquet, but there are still stones on the path. We will continue to stumble and fall, and the body of Christ will be injured at times. But I want you to notice what the church did in the Acts of the Apostles when the problem became apparent. People went to the apostles—the bishops and leaders of the church and complained. They recognized the problem, but they also acknowledged they couldn’t do everything. They were called to spread the good news and minister to the Truth. So what did they do? They called everyone together and told them, the people of God, that it was the communities’ responsibility to select responsible people to fix the

problem, and so they did. And now, that is your task. Today you cross a milestone into adulthood. And so, your responsibility to the body of Christ increases.

One of the last things I had you do in class was to choose a value you would use to shape your life. What was your cornerstone value going to be? If body of Christ is going to continue to heal itself on the journey to God's house, you will need to live by those values.

You will need the honesty (TP, PH) to admit when the body is broken. To do that you will need to value your community (KA) and look upon it with compassion (JD, ME) and care (JP). You will need to be generous (JK) with your service (DG, BS), volunteering (CJ), and charity (SWP, EZ). You will need courage (CB, JV), mental toughness (JC), and the right attitude (NC) to approach the hard work (ZX) needed to conserve (GE) what we've been given and continue to grow (SC) as we ought. Perseverance (NC, AE, CG, SW), persistence (IP), and strength (SS) will help you make the sacrifices (DJ) necessary to heal the world. Your open minds (AA), tolerance (JD), and courtesy (SC, AG) will help you confidently (LM) maintain friendships (JH, RR, JS, NV) and with hope (PH, JP, AR) and optimism (ZC) make new friends of those on the margins. Relying upon pragmatism (HO) you will be able to have the wisdom (BM) to recognize what you can fix with efficiency (RJ, MM) and what you will need the patience (SHP) to endure a little longer. Motivated (KB) by the recognition of the equal dignity of all

(DH) you will strive to be accountable (CB) in your actions so as to walk with integrity (NH). Moderation (JJ, SD, MH, LV) will help you maintain your health (JJ). With sufficient, intelligent laziness (BK)—really, Broden, really? we Benedictines are efficient and use one word calling it moderation—you will be able to look upon your journey through life with appreciation (CM) and joy (JH, NK) at all that you were able to accomplish. And really you will be able to recognize that God has been with you through it all. So that, whenever you do doubt and feel the pain of brokenness and ask “Where are you God?” You can hear Jesus—as the good teacher that he is—answer your question with his own—“Have I been with you all this time and you still do not recognize me?” And looking back at all you have done to help others, you can give thanks and remember—Christ has no hands but yours.