

3.12.17 Second Sunday of Lent Homily

Jesus gave Sr. Faustina a Lenten retreat in 1938. During that retreat he offered her an instruction of 25 items to assist her in winning the battle for her soul—to take up battle against spiritual evils. Today we unpack four more strategies to lead us to heaven.

Jesus said, “Always justify to yourself the opinions of your superiors and of your confessor.” Remember, Christ is speaking to St. Faustina who lives in a convent. But we all have people in authority over us. The devil aims to divide and conquer...so humble obedience to authentic authority is a spiritual weapon.

It is easy to see authentic authority in the relationship of parent and child. Kids, when your parents exercise their authority over you, what are you to do? Resist with all your might? This is tempting at every age of childhood and especially during adolescence. Sometimes you are OK with doing what you are told, some of you are actually really good at it. When you are feeling defiant, remember that it is not only possible, but likely, that the evil one is planting the seeds of disharmony in your home. Remember, the devil aims to divide and conquer.

If the devil drives a wedge between you and your parents, you are likely to make other bad choices. The same is true for adults who labor under authority and all Catholics who live under the authority of religious leaders. Once a house is divided against itself, it will fall.

Sr. Faustina was a religious sister. She lived under the authority of her superior and of her confessor. Jesus asked her to justify to herself the opinions of her superiors and of her confessor. She was first and always to endeavor to make sense of the instructions. She didn't need to require that her superior be able to justify their decisions, but that that she herself would try to make sense of them. She was to give the benefit of the doubt to obedience. Remember, that obedience is offered to authentic authority—that is to people who have true relationships with us and are not cooperating with evil themselves.

How does your classroom, your school, your home and your workplace change if everyone under authority presumes to be obedient? Imagine and believe that peace comes from humble submission to authentic authority.

Jesus said, “Shun murmurs like a plague.” The tongue is a powerful vessel that can do great harm. Murmuring, gossiping, is never of God. The devil is a liar who stirs up false accusations and gossip that can kill a person's reputation.

Most of us need to work hard at filtering our conversation, what we are willing to say and what we are willing to listen to. We diminish the peace of our family when we gossip about its members. We squash the joy of the workplace when we participate in the rumor mill and destroy the reputation of our coworkers.

Sometimes we want to defend our gossip by claiming that what we said is *true*. We may know the truth of other's actions, but this does not give us license to talk about them or to bring harm to their reputations. Sometimes things need to be shared to protect someone or the common good. Even then, what we say needs to be said in charity and, if possible, without harm to anyone, even if what is said is true.

St. Paul put it clearly and simply: Do nothing [say nothing] that will sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption.

Jesus said, "Let all act as they like; you are to act as I want you to." To mind one's own business is key in spiritual warfare. The devil is a busybody attempting to drag everyone down. Please God, and let the opinions of others go by the wayside.

A consensus of behavior is not necessarily a testimony to righteousness. In America 36.5 million people smoke. This does not make smoking good for you. If all your friends are drinking, this does not make the consumption of alcohol by minors legal or even a good thing. If people vote in favor of choice, this does not make abortion moral.

Let all act as they like; you are to act as I want you to. It is a constant challenge for us to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We may have a plan for the day or even for an outing, and the Holy Spirit can ask us to do something else. We have these intuitions and these promptings, and far too often we set them aside. Even when we intend to do a good thing, it may not be what Jesus wants us to do in a particular moment.

We will be less likely to listen to the Holy Spirit if we are not in the habit of obedience to authentic authority, if we are caught up in gossip. These weaken our sensitivity to the voice of Jesus and the mind of God. We are to do one thing: what Jesus wants us to do.

Lastly for today, Jesus said, "Observe the rule as faithfully as you can." Jesus is referring to the rule of the Religious Order here. Sr. Faustina was to give herself completely to the way of life of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Their rule described their way of life in great detail and Jesus wanted Sr. Faustina to follow it.

Do you live by a rule of life? In many ways we do...it is just not written down. If you are participating in the spiritual challenge for our 125th anniversary, that is a tiny portion of your rule of life. If you have taken up a special commitment for Lent, that is another portion of your rule of life, at least for Lent.

It would be a good exercise for each of us to write out our rule of life. For some, their rule of life could stand some scrutiny. It is said, "I attend Mass on Christmas, Ash Wednesday and Easter," and we already know that the rule is deficient. Jesus wants more. Jesus wants to give them more.

If your rule of life includes a regular diet of gossip, then the rule needs to be revised. If you are disobedient to your parents or if you lie, then your rule is quite lacking.

We will never have a rule of life as formal as Sr. Faustina's, but we ought to have fundamental commitments that are to be an aid to living the Christian life, commitments that are not negotiable and that we believe ourselves bound to. We start with the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. From there we add tenets that correspond to our vocation and our spiritual gifts.

If you are lacking in your commitments during Lent this year, consider this: write down 25 ways that you want to, need to, live your faith. Let it be your rule of life and stick to it. Hear the instruction of Jesus who said,

“Observe the rule as faithfully as you can.” He also said...

“Let all act as they like; you are to act as I want you to.”

“Shun murmurs like a plague.”

“Always justify to yourself the opinions of your superiors and of your confessor.”