

One of my younger brothers tells this story about himself. He was probably just a teen at the time. Our parish priest asked him if he would consider entering the seminary just like his older brother did. He said, “I don’t think so. I like the finer things in life.” Our parish priest asked, “the finer things?” My brother said, “yes, the finer things...like women and an occasional cigar.”

Even for priests, it’s not our nature to sacrifice. All of us like the finer things. Or we like those things which make us comfortable or keep us comfortable.

Lent ended a few weeks ago. During Lent I gave up a few things. I hoped that in making small sacrifices it would help me appreciate the great sacrifice Christ made for us on cross. I was also hoping that these small sacrifices would free up some time for me so that I could devote myself to extra prayer or spiritual reading instead of mindlessly watching TV each evening. I was also hoping that this practice would lead to a life change for me – that is, I would continue to seek time and ways where I could devote myself to extra prayer and spiritual reading. Instead, I’ve ended up going back to my old, comfortable habits.

Mark Twain said this about habits, “(a) habit is...not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time.”

You’d think St. Peter and his brother Apostles would be radically changed by encountering the resurrected Christ. While

that experience was certainly a profound one for St. Peter and the Apostles. But even the resurrected Christ had trouble rousing the Apostles from their fear and from their old habits.

In today's gospel, St. Peter tells his brother Apostles that he's going fishing. Fishing is what St. Peter and his brothers knew. Fishing made money for them. It was a source of security. Being fishermen is who and what these folks were. It was their source of comfort and perhaps their habit.

Jesus knows our fickle nature. He knows that it takes time for us to change our ways. He knows how attached we are to what is familiar and comfortable.

With that in mind, Jesus seeks out St. Peter. Jesus moves St. Peter from the comfort and habit of fishing to being a fisher of men.

To help him do that, Jesus feeds St. Peter and his brother Apostles. In this scene, we should draw the obvious conclusion that Jesus doesn't feed the disciples ordinary bread. Instead, he gives them the Eucharist. We know that because of the words found in the gospel – ***Jesus took bread and gave it to them.*** These are the words Jesus used at the Last Supper. These are the words we hear at every celebration of the Mass. Having received the Bread of Life, St. Peter is then able to fulfill the calling and mission that Christ gives him.

Following the meal, Jesus asks St. Peter if he loves him. And he asks him that question three times. Again, it seems that Jesus understands just how fickle we are. He knows that we can give

him the right answer, but there's a chance we won't follow through with what we say or promise. He knows that our being comfortable with things as they are might undermine our commitment to follow through with living out our faith by our actions of love.

Despite that possibility, Jesus doesn't give up on us. He continues to work with us and on us. Jesus keeps coaxing us to move beyond our comfort zone by putting into practice for others the love we profess for him.

Receiving the Eucharist is a familiar and comfortable encounter. We revel in that time when we have "communion" with the Lord whom we have just received. But receiving this sacrament, this sacrifice of love, demands that we move from this moment of tranquility and peace to a life of service. That's what Jesus was teaching St. Peter. That is what he teaches us each time we partake of the Eucharist.

This lesson is something that happens throughout our lives. We seldom "get it" the first time we hear it. I find myself constantly moving from comfort to service, back to comfort, and then to service – over and over again.

And so it was for St. Peter. There is a legend about St. Peter that illustrates this point. The legend describes St. Peter hightailing his way out of Rome to avoid persecution and possible martyrdom. As he walks (or runs) along the Via Appia, he has a vision of the risen Christ. St. Peter then asks Jesus, "quo vadis, domine?" (Lord, where are you going?) And Jesus replies, "I am

going to Rome to be crucified.” That response led St. Peter to return to Rome and embrace his fate.

As a result of that encounter, St. Peter moved from what was safe and what he hoped would be comfortable to an act of love and sacrifice. Receiving Holy Communion moves us from a place of comfort to a lifetime of love and service.

In September of 1962, President Kennedy addressed the faculty and students at Rice University. It was this address that moved our country’s space program to the next level. In his speech, Kennedy exclaimed,

We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win....

As Catholics, we choose the Kingdom of God and we choose to love by serving our sisters and brothers as Jesus commands. We do this, not because it is easy, but because it is hard and because it is the way that leads to eternal life. Our food for this venture is the Eucharist. And it is the Eucharist that lifts us up from doing what is comfortable to doing what is most loving and most meaningful despite the cost.

Amen? Amen!