

Homily -- 16th Sunday OT; B-Cycle

Before seminary, I had studied to be a teacher. I wanted to teach creative writing and literature. In college I drank in the classics.

My passion was for poetry, mythology, and New England folk lore.

I wanted to share that passion with young minds. God of course, had other ideas.

And when I was confronted with vocation I resisted it, for many reasons, not the least of which was, I didn't want to surrender my dream of teaching.

But the Lord has ways of getting his way with us, and I did go to seminary.

About 3 months before I was ordained a deacon, I had to prepare a speech for the faculty on why I felt I was ready for ordination.

And while I was preparing that talk I was thinking about my past life, and

wondering what my life would have been like had I gone the other route.'

And a word, an inspired thought, came to me from God, very clear, and he said,

"Schools teach people how to make a living. I am calling you, to be one of those who teach people how to live."

Shepherds of the Lord. That's what we are. That is the function of a priest, to shepherd the flock of the Lord. I have found, as Jeremiah found in our 1st -- this is no small task.

The Lord was speaking through Jeremiah against the negligent shepherds of his flock. Why were they negligent?

Because the priests and leaders of Israel in Jeremiah's day had stopped teaching the people to live by the covenant, to live God's truth.

They had stopped challenging the people to be constantly converting their lives toward the Lord, and the whole people had fallen into spiritual laziness, idolatry, and sin. Who does the Lord blame? The shepherds!

Priests have an obligation to tell people the truth. We can't afford to be comfortable.

We can't sit quietly in the face of moral dangers and hope for the best.

Our own patron, Saint John Paul II, who I firmly believe was a prophet for our age said, "The most pastorally sensitive thing you can do for a person, is to tell them the truth."

Some people think that being a priest means being a *nice* guy.
So just be *nice* to everyone and you'll be a good priest.
Let people do what they want, and smile and be *nice*.
No! That isn't being a priest! That's being a coward!
We are not called to be *nice*. God didn't say to Moses, "Thou shalt be *nice*!"
Jesus never said in the beatitudes, "Blessed are the *nice*."

We are called to go beyond nice. We are called to be great lovers! We are called to love all people! And loving people means caring about them enough to tell them the truth.

Loving people means caring about them enough to tell them when they are doing something that will hurt themselves, hurt others, or hurt society.

In a word, sin. That's what all sin does. Sin hurts the individual doing it.

Sin hurts someone else. Or sin hurts society. That's the truth.

The truth is often uncomfortable. Sometimes the truth means running the risk that people won't like us. Jeremiah knew this. The people *hated* him!

They hated him so much they tried to kill him, more than once.

Jesus said in Saint John's gospel, "*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*"

But Jesus also said a few verses later, "*I have come to take you out of the world, and for that the world will hate you.*" He was right! Jesus was hated too.

So much so they killed him. Then they killed the apostles after him.

So why we should strive to know the truth and spread the truth?

Not because we want to die, but because Jesus is truth, and we want to be set free!

Free from sin, and slavery *to* sin; a freedom that can only come from Jesus Christ.

And a freedom that comes with a price.

I saw a great poster on Facebook of Arlington National Cemetery, the countless rows of grave markers, and the caption read, "Freedom isn't free." It's true. Freedom isn't free.

Someone has to make the sacrifice for the rest of us.

Someone has to be willing to put on the uniform, or wear the badge.

Someone has to be willing to carry the gun to protect the borders around the

country, and maintain law and order inside the country.
And that means risking your life, and sometimes losing it.
And that also means WE have to make the sacrifice of caring for those people and their families if they're killed or injured.
And when we see someone desecrating the flag we get infuriated, and rightly so, because we understand that's an abuse of our freedom of speech.
We understand to dishonor the flag is to also dishonor those people who died protecting us who stood below it in the past, and who are risking their lives everyday protecting us who stand under it in the present.
We understand all of this so clearly when it comes to the physical world.
Why do we have such difficulty understanding it in the spiritual world?
As it so often does, realities in the physical world are reflections of realities in the spiritual world.

Freedom isn't free. With freedom comes responsibility. Jesus put on that uniform. Jesus pinned on that badge. Jesus armed himself with the weapon of his own blood, did battle with, and vanquished the devil, and died in the process. And now we have a responsibility to him, because to call ourselves Catholic, means we commit ourselves to live by a certain code of moral conduct. We fail at it, more often than not, but we keep trying, we keep pushing ourselves to do better, because if he was willing to sacrifice himself to that extent because he thought I was worth it, the least I can do is make much smaller sacrifices for my good, the good of others, and the good of society.

So now I'm on this diet, the sadistic doctor diet, because I have to lose weight because of my diabetes and my heart. Now I could have the attitude, "Hey! This is *my* body!

"This is *my* life! If I want to eat pasta, cake, ice cream, and beer, (preferably all in the same meal), that's what I'm going do! And if I die, I die!"

But what if God had more for me to do before I die, and now I can't get into heaven for a loooooong time because I didn't live long enough to do it?
Gluttony, sin, hurts the individual doing the sinning.

What about the people who care about me, and the people who rely on me; my bishop, my parish, my brother priests, my parents. Sin hurts others.

What about the expense to take care of me if the stroke or heart attack I have doesn't kill me, but only disables me? Sin hurts society.

Don't I owe it to all those people to take better care of myself, especially if it only means a little sacrifice on my part?

Fifty years ago the Church said 'no' to contraception, against popular opinion.

Now contraception is being linked to all kinds of health issues in women.

40 years ago the Church said 'no' to abortion against popular opinion.

Now, for the first time since its legalization there are more pro-life people in the nation than pro-abortion. Why?

Maybe it has something to do with the statistic that 80% of women who've *had* abortions claim that if they change just one decision in their lives it would be that one. And after 60 million abortions, that's a lot of women.

Now the issue is gay marriage. We lost that battle to public opinion too.

I look on Facebook and I see all the Catholics with the rainbow colors over their profile pictures because they support gay marriage. OK, have it your way.

Now the Mormons want to legalize polygamy. (And let the games begin!)

Pandora's box has been opened. Good luck getting it closed again.

And 40 years from now when society looks back and says, "Ooops! That was a mistake!" We'll once again say, "Yeah, we tried to tell you."

But by then society will hate us for a new moral issue we're saying "no," too.

But that's OK. We expect that. Because we're shepherds of the Lord.

We're the watchdogs of morality. We're the conscience of society.

And whether society wants to admit it or not, I think deep down they know that, and they *want* us to be that if for no other reason than they need to blame us why they're unhappy, instead of blaming the sin they love more than God.

I'm proud to be a shepherd. I'm proud to be a watchdog. And I thank God he

called me to *this* teaching vocation instead of the one I studied for.
I wouldn't have it any other way. Blessed be God forever.