

Homily—18th Sunday OT; B-cycle

“...you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.” So Saint Paul tells the Ephesians.

This is a great passage for a spiritual self-examination.

“Put away the old self of your former way of life.” What was your old self?

Speaking for me, my old self wanted fame, wealth, and glory.

In college I planned to live a life like Ernest Hemmingway after I graduated.

I was going to travel the world and write books about my experiences and become rich and famous.

I wanted to travel to India to work with Mother Theresa’s order, not so much out of charity, but because I wanted to write a book about the experience.

I was planning to build my fame by linking myself to her fame.

I wanted to sail around the world alone and write a book about THAT experience.

I was going to drive to all the states in the country living in an RV, guest lecturing at colleges and writing about those experiences as well.

Then I was going to settle down with a teaching job.

I was going to teach creative writing and literature, get married and have a family at around 35 years old.

Because you might as well get married at that point because life is pretty much downhill from there.

I mean if you haven’t done it by the time you’re 35, hang it up! That was my attitude!

Life revolved around me; MY fame, MY fortune, MY glory, MY pain, MY struggles.

And that’s why my former self was *corrupted through deceitful desires*.

Whenever the focus is me, me, me our goals will be corrupt, our desires will be deceitful.

I love telling funny stories about my experiences in the priesthood and so many people say to me, “Father, you should write a book. It would be a best seller.” And I could write a book.

And I make the excuse I don’t have time to write a book, but I could if I really wanted to.

People have been bugging me for years, even before I got to this assignment to put my homilies on-line, which I finally just started doing on the parish website, but I

resisted for a long time.

And I always made the excuse I don't know how to do that stuff on computers.

But I could have learned, if I really wanted to. The truth is those things scare me.

Because I never want to become that person again; the person who craves attention, praise, glory, fame.

There's a monster, a demon deep down inside me I keep locked in a very tight cage.

We all have one. For some it's alcohol or drugs, or some other addiction.

Others it's greed. Others it's anger. Mine is my ego.

And I fear it because it's the one thing that can keep me out of heaven if I let it.

I always knew, even in seminary, that it wasn't the vow of celibacy I had to worry about.

It was the vow of obedience, because I have a defiant streak in me.

There is a part of me that doesn't want to be told what to do, or take anyone else's advice, or admit I don't have all the answers. It took me years as a priest to get past that.

That was my old self, my former ways, and I want them to stay former.

BUT, *"be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way."*

Conversion experience. A conversion experience is simply when God moves out of the abstract and becomes tangible to us.

The Church just celebrated the feast of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order, this past Friday.

Ignatius was a soldier, and his leg was wounded, so he was convalescing at a convent.

The nuns were nursing him back to health.

Ignatius loved stories about Knights and chivalry, and while he was recovering he requested books of that sort to read and pass the time.

Well the convent didn't have any of those books, so what they gave him was a copy of the New Testament and a book of the lives of the Saints.

Ignatius read these books over and over again.

When his eyes got tired of reading, and he lost himself in daydream, he thought to himself, what's to stop me from doing what Saint Francis of Assisi did, or the apostles did, and leave everything for Christ?

Ignatius also kept daydreaming of knights and tales of chivalry.

But what he found that when he daydreamed of knights and chivalry, he experienced joy and peace, but the joy and peace soon passed.

When he daydreamed of holy things he also experienced joy and peace, but the joy and peace lingered long after he had stopped daydreaming.

And then he made his decision. When he was back on his feet, he left his sword and armor in front of a statue of the Blessed Mother, and founded a teaching and missionary order that he wanted to be the right arm of the Pope.

Ignatius' mind was renewed. Ignatius shed his former way of life and put on a new self.

My conversion experience happened in 1988 when I was 22 years old, with a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, where the Blessed mother had been appearing to several children.

The debate goes on whether the apparitions are authentic or not.

And without a doubt, the Blessed Mother appearing for this long is unprecedented.

But even if the Church decides what's happening there is not of God, is not authentic, I cannot deny what happened to me there.

That was the first time God was real to me. That was the first time I experienced real peace, real joy, and that's what a conversion experience is; God gives us a sample, a taste, an horedurve of what heaven is like, so we crave more of it.

And we know we'll never be the same again.

And although we may kid ourselves at first, we soon figure out that if I want to experience that peace and that joy again, I have to change some things in my life.

But they're not big changes, so what the heck. But then those changes challenge us to make more changes, and so on and so on.

So we really shouldn't call it a conversion experience. It's really conversion experiences.

Plural. Because it keeps happening in stages throughout our whole lives.

Renewing the spirit of our minds, putting on the new self and shedding the old is continuous.

And even though nothing ever matches that feeling of the initial conversion experience we had, God keeps reminding us of it through little signs that he's still present to us; little miracles, little answered prayers, always encouraging us to take one step closer to him today than we were yesterday.

Well I'm really happy for you Father, and that's all fine and good for you, but I never had an experience like that, so I guess God doesn't want me. Nonsense! Of course he does!

If you've never had a conversion experience what have you done to invite one?

Well how do I do that? "*...put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.*"

I flew half way around the world seeking righteousness and holiness of truth.

I challenged God on the plane on my way over and said, "I want to believe. I want to do what's right, so if you're real, you better make it clear to me, because I'm just about ready to give up believing in you."

God never turns away a soul who's sincerely seeking him, but he doesn't justify laziness, and he has no patience with personal agenda's, or trying to justify our love of sin. But if you reach out to him in faith, sincerely seeking righteousness and truth, God will respond to you.

So what are you going to be? Are you going to be a nine to five Catholic?

Fulfill the rules and requirements and let the chips fall where they may.

If you're satisfied with that God Bless you. But if want something more exciting...

If you want something more fulfilling...*put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on that new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.*

(And then be prepared for the ride of your life!)