

**Homily for the Diocesan Youth Conference
Carlinville**

**The Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
March 1, 2014**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, last Sunday, as I was walking out of a restaurant in Chicago, the hostess made a comment about all of the negative things that are happening in the world. She lamented the fact that the news is filled with story after story about bad things. She even asked the question with a bit of despair in her voice: "What's happening to this world?!?"

Such a reaction is not uncommon particularly among older people as they see the values that were so dominant in their earlier years seemingly being overturned in the younger generations. As a result, many of these people have a less than optimistic outlook regarding the future and may even be critical of young people in general. It is, of course, unfair to make such generalizations about young people. In fact, many young people share these views. A Rasmussen poll this week had only 32% of those polled saying the country is headed in the right direction, with 61% saying

we're on the wrong track. A Gallup poll in December had only 39% of respondents saying that they saw America in a positive position, with less than half thinking it will be better in five years.¹

We cannot be blind to the fact that there are some elements of truth in these observations, elements which should cause each of us, young and old, to consider how we should respond to these challenges in our world.

In this regard, I am reminded of a song from one of my favorite music groups, the British band called Coldplay. The song I am thinking of is one that the band released a few years ago by the name of "Clocks." The second verse of the song provides a helpful reflection for us. As you know, I like to sing, so I would like to sing this verse for you:

Confusion that never stops, closing walls and ticking clocks (gonna)

Come back and take you home, I could not stop, but you now know (singing)

Come out upon my seas, curse missed opportunities (am I)

A part of the cure, or am I part of the disease?

The song speaks to the situation of all of the negative and confusing things happening in the world, causing us to feel as though the walls are closing in on us as the clock continues to tick. The last line, though, poses a

question that is well worth our consideration: “Am I a part of the cure, or am I part of the disease?”

As I mentioned, all of the problems of our world cannot be blamed just on the youth, even if some try to do just that. Regardless of the source of these difficulties, everybody is called to do their part in responding, including the youth. A choice made to do nothing results, in a sense, to our being a part of the disease. This may sound strange considering we are not the ones doing these bad things. Our inactivity, though, contributes to allowing these injustices and sins to continue without resistance, spreading like a disease.

Our readings for today provide some helpful insights for us as we ponder the reasons that we might have for not stepping up to be a part of the cure. In the Gospel, we hear Jesus confronting an attitude of undue self-centeredness. He tells His disciples: “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear” (Matthew 6:25). Many young people feel the pressure to fit in and are thus overly concerned about things such as how they dress, how they look, or how much they weigh. That is not to say that these things are not important, but if we are spending all of our time just focused on those

things, we do not have time for others and the issues with which they struggle.

Someone once said, "You can tell the size of your God by looking at the size of your worry list. The longer your list, the smaller your God." We know, of course, that God does not shrink and cannot really be measured in size, but the point here is that, the more we trust in the world or in ourselves than we trust in God, the more our priorities change, and God falls out of the list of our personal priorities and becomes secondary for us.

In the second reading, St. Paul speaks to another challenge that inhibits us from contributing to the cure. He writes: "It does not concern me in the least that I be judged by you or any human tribunal" (1 Cor 4:3). He did not care about the opinions of others. This is a very different attitude from many people, not just the youth, but at every age of life. Fear of what people might think or say about us is a very powerful deterrent to acting in a particular circumstance.

This fear is very much related to the attitude that Jesus challenges in the Gospel. Fear of judgment is just another manifestation of an outlook which is focused just on the self. As a result, we often decide not to act simply because we do not want people to laugh at us or criticize us for our

words or actions. Once again, a decision to not respond by doing what is right is a decision to not be a part of the cure, and thus permitting the disease to spread.

Aware of these reasons which contribute to our resistance to act and so be a part of the cure, we can now focus on the solution proposed to us. After addressing the anxieties that we face as human beings, Jesus gives us these comforting words: "So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides" (Matthew 6:31-33).

He is telling us that if we keep our focus on Him and direct our energy toward building up the Kingdom of God, we have no cause for fear. We are invited to be like children who are so at peace in the arms of their father that nothing disturbs them. Our Heavenly Father will not abandon us when we strive to put aside our own worries to follow His will and serve His people. It was with this type of confidence that St. Paul was able to persevere in his ministry, fearless of whatever roadblocks He might encounter, for He knew that what he was seeking to build up the Kingdom

and that nothing could separate him from the Lord who would provide for everything that he needed.

Being a part of the cure to the challenges of the world is not an easy thing for us. Jesus reminded His disciples of this at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. He concludes the Beatitudes by giving them, and us, words of great reassurance: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12). This promise alone should be enough for us to not worry about the difficulties we may encounter from spreading the Gospel in word and deed, for we know that in the end, we will be rewarded with the one thing that truly matters, eternal life.

All of this is, of course, much easier said than done. What is required to be a part of the cure is the supernatural gift of faith. We are invited to imitate the example of the man in the Gospel whose son was possessed by a demon. When he brought him to be cured, he pleaded with Jesus: "if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us". Jesus responded to him: "'If you can!' Everything is possible to one who has faith", to which the man responded: "I do believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:14-29).

Whenever we are tempted to avoid acting in response to one of the many challenges that we will inevitably face in our life as a Christian, let us ask the Lord to help the unbelief that causes us to worry about our reputation or our comfort and trust that He is with us and will provide for all that we need. As we receive the Eucharist today, we pray that our faith will be strengthened so that we might be courageous in our witness to Christ and His Church. By doing this, we obey His command to “seek first the Kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33) and in doing so, we become a part of the cure to the disease of sin in our world.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Cited by Peggy Noonan, “America and the Aggressive Left,” THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, March 1-2, 2014, p. A15.