

Homily for the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time – Jan. 21, 2018

Did you ever hear this story? It is about the premature birth of a butterfly? There is a man who comes across a butterfly. It is about to come to life in the bark of a tree. However, the butterfly is still in the cocoon stage of its development.

The man watches. He waits. But he grows impatient. He continues to grow impatient waiting for the transformation into a beautiful butterfly.

So he picks up the cocoon and blows his warm breath onto the creature. Sure enough the creature comes to life. Yet it emerges incomplete.

Its wings have not yet had time to develop under the warmth of the sun. The wings are fragile. They fail. So the poor creature dies. The change, the transformation ended.

Now switch the picture of the butterfly to the apostles in the gospel for today. These first followers have been observing Jesus, sizing him up. But they put him too quickly on a pedestal. They are impatient and can't wait to follow him.

They say to themselves: "this Jesus guy we have been observing. He looks like an up and coming star. I am going to hitch my wagon to his rising star.

This Jesus will be a glamorous glorious god. Politically powerful, spiritually strong, oh yes I want to follow this guy, I want to be on the ground floor of this movement."

In fact do you recall that one scene where the disciples ask Jesus a question? They ask Jesus "When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left." They want to ride his coattails.

Of course eventually the apostles eyes are opened. Jesus is arrested, tortured, crucified. That is not what they had in mind when they placed Jesus on a pedestal. So Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him, and the rest fled him.

Okay in this homily is there a connection between the butterfly that emerges unnaturally from the cocoon, and the apostles who too quickly place Jesus on a pedestal? Yes.

You see following Jesus Christ is all about change, being transformed. That is the end game of Christianity.....to be transformed.....into what....into Christ. But that transformation cannot be premature. Cannot be hurried. For it cannot depend entirely on us. It does not depend on our hot air to use the butterfly analogy.

Just as for the cocoon to change into a butterfly, nature must be allowed to do its creation..... the supernatural life of God must be allowed to be creative in us.

And God's supernatural life works not only through church, prayer and sacraments but also, and sometimes most effectively, through the frustrations and failures, the setbacks and sufferings, the injustices and injuries of our lives. The first followers of Jesus, like you and me, had to be schooled in these lessons had to drink of the cup that Jesus drank.

If you and I forget this, religion can end up being like the hot air that deforms and kills premature life. You and I ought to accept that we probably have to go through similar growing pains, similar developmental stages as did those first apostles.

We too might start out hitching our wagon to Jesus star but then suffering comes into life....and we feel like a sign I once saw. This is not your real life. This is only a test. If this were your real life, you would have been given better instructions."

Let me close with these beautiful consoling words from a mystic to a friend who was frustrated with God:

"Trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability – and that it may take a very long time.

Don't force yourself to be what grace and circumstances (acting on your own good will) will make you tomorrow. Only God can say what this new spirit gradually forming in you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete."