Father Tilley’s Homily from Weekend of March 22

Wednesday morning was a day that I do not think a lot of us will forget. It was a day where I think we all could say, “what could possibly happen next.”

I’m not going to lie. I was planning on sleeping in on Wednesday morning. In fact, I did not even set my alarm clock. I was going to wake up naturally - and boy did I. I think, just like many of you at home, I experienced a jolt of confusion and panic. Our rectory was swaying back and forth, my light in the house was swinging above me, and all of this happened while I laid in bed and thought to myself, “this is it.” Luckily, it wasn’t the end. The earthquake ended and we were all left assessing everything that happened during the week. And guys, what a week, it felt like something apocalyptic: A pandemic, an earthquake, and then on the first day of spring we got a pretty good amount of snow in the mountains. What’s next? Locusts? Toxic Frogs coming out of Utah Lake? It reminded me a lot of the movie Ghostbusters, the original one with Bill Murray. In the movie, they’re discussing the panic of the apocalypse: This is not a direct quote, but the ghostbusters described the end of the world as something like this: “We need to accept the fact that this city is headed for a disaster of biblical proportions. Old Testament Biblical proportions, real wrath of God type stuff. Fire and Brimstone coming down from the skies, rivers and seas boiling, forty years of darkness, dogs and cats living together…”

I think that is how a lot of us felt. I think some of us allowed panic to take hold of us, a little more than it normally does. Guys, that is human. This week has not been normal. This situation that we are going through is not normal. It is something very new, and it is something that I think is making all of us more aware of our brokenness, our need for God, and our need for the community.

Grace operates in brokenness. Grace operates from the mud that Jesus spit in and placed in the eyes of the blind man. Grace operates from the wounds of our Savior on the cross. The relationship between grace and brokenness is that one heals the other through the other. The Grace of Jesus Christ heals our brokenness through the wounds of our Savior. The cross unites these two seemingly opposite realities in a profound way.

On Friday afternoon, the Bishop announced that we will not be celebrating our Palm Sunday, Holy Week, or Easter celebrations together as a community. Instead, we will be live-streaming them. Guys, I don’t even know how to process this news fully. Our liturgy is what directs our hearts and minds toward Christ and binds our community together in selfless and sacrificial love.

It is a public act of worship to God from his people. Our inability to worship together as a full community is a wound. It is a brokenness, but God operates in brokenness. He can turn even this darkness into light for our community. And He will. Because our prayers and our community cannot be broken through this temporary physical distance. God’s love is bigger than that. The worship of our Lord in the liturgy is bigger than that.
The one thing we know from our Gospel today is that God entering into our brokenness is going to surprise us a little bit.

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “go wash yourself in the pool.” And the blind man was healed.

The blind man in our Gospel today could have never anticipated God’s grace operating through physical mud and the intentional breaking of the Sabbath law. God’s grace arrives in an odd way in the Gospel today, a way that can never be anticipated. And yet, God’s grace brings vision and clarity to this man for the first time in his life. Through spit and mud, the blind man sees, physically and spiritually, and proclaims “I do believe, Lord.”

Our Faith and our Creed is solid rock. And although we might personally struggle, although we might personally doubt or fear, we still believe because we still encounter the grace that changes light into darkness, that changes blindness into vision. I have been edified by your faith through all these things. After the earthquake this week, I made a decision to begin calling a couple dozen of parishioners a day - just to check in and make sure people are okay, so many of you were ready and willing to help out your brothers and sisters in the parish any way that you can. Your faith, as you respond to the needs of our community, or as you watch this mass at home, is an encouragement to every priest who serves you. You are wildly generous during a time of great need. Thank you for allowing grace to operate in your families lives during this uncertain time.

In a lot of ways, when we embrace the strangeness of our current situation. It’s like we are that blind man, and we are allowing Christ himself to mix his spit in the mud and place it in our eyes. But what is the newness that we see? How is our vision changed?

Guys, we can’t just experience an earthquake and go back to sleep. The first thing we do when we experience an earthquake is check our foundation. What are we building our lives on? What is truly important? Are we more grateful for our faith and the promise of salvation? Are we more grateful for our family and our loved ones? Do we see them as a precious gift from God? Are we more grateful for all the many gifts that we have in this modern way of living? Are we more aware of the brokenness and the needs of our brothers and sisters around us in our community? Are we more aware of the poor around us? Do we see them as precious gifts as well?

But most of all, when we encounter grace through brokenness, it is an opportunity to check the foundations of our hearts.

The prophet Samuel tells us today in scripture: “Do not judge from appearance or from lofty stature…Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart.”

Is Christ the foundation of our heart? Is our heart crucified with Our lord? Or is there other things that we build upon? Things that fade away. Things that are not everlasting.

When meditating upon the effects of Christ on the human heart, Paul simply proclaims in the second reading today, “Awake.”

The earth is shaking around us. We cannot simply turn over in our bed and go back to sleep. We need to check the foundation of our hearts. We need to allow God to place mud and spit in our eyes, and transform our vision.