

Lent IV
3/10/2024

NO BACKSPACING

Think of typing, on a computer, i-pad or other device. If you make a mistake, you can simply backspace and it goes away. Today businesses, organizations and even some parishes have a purpose statement. Obviously the goal is to share what one seeks to do. What we find in the gospel today is Jesus' purpose statement. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.* The key to that eternal life is faith in Jesus.

Faith is both a gift and a human action. We believe because God allows us to and we believe because it's also something we do. Faith means believing but faith also means trusting, faith means acting but faith also means loving. Faith means accepting truth and living the truth, living in the light, living and following in the light of Christ. Faith in Jesus is an invitation to eternal life that he leaves us free to accept or reject.

If Jesus' purpose statement is: *Sent by the Father in love so that through faith we may have eternal life.* That leads to our purpose statement. You could put it like this: *To accept this gift in faith to have eternal life.*

The light came into the world and people preferred darkness to light. Why? Why do we sometimes prefer darkness to light? Maybe people prefer the darkness they know to the light they don't know. Perhaps because there can be a delight in it; not a good or wholesome delight but a dark and morose delight where we take joy in the misfortunes of others. This morose delight or false joy can take *many* different forms.

The darkness can express itself in so many ways: things like prejudice and racism, war and disrespect for human life both before and after birth. It can be struggles within ourselves such as compulsions and addictions. It may be attitudes we won't let go of or grudges onto which we hold.

Since his election eleven years ago, Pope Francis has many times targeted one of these false joys: gossip. He compares gossip to a bomb and gossipers to terrorists. The bomb of gossip can detonate in workplaces and in families. That bomb can go off in parishes, schools and parking lots.

The human tongue is capable of great good and great evil. Our tongue can be the hardest part of our body to control; in what we say, how we say it, where we say it, about whom we say it and that will be a lifelong task *for everyone*. I say that not to discourage people but to encourage them. It will be a lifelong task but we can make progress. That's just one way we seek the light rather than the darkness.

Something my parents emphasized to my brother and me was that once you say something, you can never take it back. You can apologize. You can be forgiven but you can't unsay something.

We confess what we have done *in our thoughts and in our words, in what we have done and in what we have failed to do*. Today our words include not just our spoken words but our written and our electronic words. Social media has brought this to a new level, people can easily spout off in anger, derision, cruelty and outright falsehood. It's helpful to remember that what we say or do in anger, we usually regret. What we say on social media isn't like gossiping with one person, which is bad enough, it involves an indefinite number of people.

Sometimes there are things that can make us angry and we can have good reason for being angry but good reason or not, that's not all right to gossip about or to detract others. It's been said you have a right to be angry but not to be cruel. We rightly and highly value freedom of speech, but with that right comes the responsibility of using it rightly. We still bear the responsibility for our own words. When we die, we won't be judged on what other people said about us but about what we ourselves said. Unlike word processing, there's no backspace to make our words go away.

Jesus goes on to say that whoever lives the truth comes to the light. He doesn't just say those who speak the truth but he says those who *live* the truth. The truth isn't just something we speak. It's something we live or don't live, with our actions and our lives, whether in big dramatic ways or in every *little way*. Through lives of intentional faith, we strive not just to speak the truth but to live the truth, to allow our

lives to become living reflections of the truth of Jesus, so that people can see us, and hopefully, get a glimpse of Jesus.

In all of our lives there are struggles between light and darkness but, we don't face those struggles by ourselves. In the desert, Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a pole so that those bitten by deadly snakes could look upon it and live. So too, Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that through his death and resurrection, through his Paschal Mystery, we who have been bitten by sin could rise with him. That we could rise from death to new life; from sin to grace; from dark pleasures and morose delights to the joy and peace of the gospel. We do this through faith in Jesus, the word made flesh, the human face of God, who calls us to reconciliation with God and one another and who nourishes us here in the Eucharist.

During Lent, we strive to grow in greater conversion, in hearts more deeply open to the love of God. We strive to move from darkness to light. Each day, perhaps each hour, we can be tempted to choose the darkness. Each day, perhaps each hour, we have the opportunity to choose the light. Jesus' purpose is to bring us to the light of eternal life. Our purpose is to accept this gift in faith and so to share in that light of eternal life.