

19 Pentecost 2003
"First, Last and Always"
Br. John Ogle, OSF

James and John really set the other ten disciples off. They asked Jesus if ..in Glory ..they can sit on his right and his left.

Have you ever been the one to organize an event where there was a head table ..a dais? I have. The Virginia Communications Hall of Fame. It's so easy to wound an individual who has become accustomed to being treated " a certain way." (Seat me as far from the front as you can ..close to some guy who doesn't show up ..that way I can eat his desert).

Some folk feel they have earned right of place at a banquet ..or in life. They have prayed and followed and believed and supported and want that to be recognized. ..to be Jesus's right hand man.

The Lord explains that "**whoever wants to become great among you must become your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.**"

You mean the one who finishes with the most toys doesn't win? It may be a little confusing to read how tough its going to be for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. One could get the impression ..as St. Francis did ..that it is necessary to sell all and give it to the poor ..and become one of them.

Poverty ..in fact ..must be our goal. But I don't think it's God's intention that the fruit of our labors is to be rejected. Rather we are expected to strive for that **poverty of spirit** that recognizes that we are sinners ..that while we have attained much ..in our heart of hearts we're poor. If we get all puffed up by our success our poor little heart gets squeezed by our ego and we forget that what we have is a Blessing from God ..all of it.

No doubt many Godless people have attained great wealth ..some have died with a multi million dollar net worth ..but no one has ever figured out a way to take one single penny with them ..and if those folk died without having given anything to others (on any level) they're likely not enjoying what the poor beggar at the gate will enjoy when he dies. How many stories to you hear about how money never buys happiness?

We leave the way we arrived ..naked ..with nothing but our lives to convince God we're worthy of all he gave us.

There was a lady at one of the big churches who made a point of meeting with her Rector to tell him exactly how she wanted her funeral to be conducted ..the hymns ..the speakers ..the flowers. She also asked him to make sure that when

she was laid out at the funeral home for her friends to come by ..she wanted to be clutching something very special.

A crucifix the Priest asked? No. A picture of our Savior? No.

The lady wanted to be holding a fork. Why, a fork asked the Priest. Well, she replied, for my whole life I've been coming to church events. Pancake suppers, pot luck suppers, steak feasts, parish picnics. The food was wonderful ..and lovingly prepared ..and for years ..as we finished eating ..someone would come around to the table and say "Keep your fork, dear, the best is yet to come." I want everyone to know I'm ready.

What must we do to be ready? Well ..we can begin by **forking** it over ..we must give **all that we are** to God. We must trust Him to guide us. We believe that all that we REALLY need will be provided. It takes time to figure out what is REAL need ..and what is desire.

We must make peace with God before we can make peace with ourselves or those around us.

Early this month we observed St. Francis Day. I was a busy little Friar ..preaching at two Animal Blessings and leading the St. Francis prayer at another. I delight each year in watching the kids and their animals ..and the older folks and theirs. As children we learn to love from our pets ..as adults we learn HOW to love them back. St. Francis looked into the eyes of God's creatures and saw all of God's creation. He prayed and meditated daily and spent his life trying to live in imitation of Christ.

Things went really well in the early years of the growth of the Franciscan brotherhood. After a few years, however, there were problems ..the church was concerned about the way the brothers lived their ministry and about who was in charge. Some of the newer brothers felt the Franciscans deserved the kind of monastery the Benedictines had ..a university ..a library ..they wanted what Francis had tried to avoid.

Francis went into a funk. (blue not brown) He spent some time in real agony. In some cases no one would listen and he was offended ..and that hurt him ..not that they wouldn't listen ..but that he was offended by it. He had learned from watching a spider build a magnificent web and then attack and kill a fly that landed in it ..that we don't understand everything ..but in God's hands ..everything will be okay.

Finally Francis visited Clare ..later St. Clare ..at her convent. She was a great listener ..he really trusted her ..and she gave him the phrase that helped him survive ..helped him to shake off his pain and depression.

St. Clare said **“God is ..and that’s enough.”** GOD IS ..and that’s enough.

Jesus knows what we’re going through ..as Paul tells us this morning **“we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God.”** He can sympathize because he has been tested as we are. He became man. He suffered and died a man.

He can shine his light in our darkness and give us Joy. He can take our confusion and give us clarity. He can ..and will ..and wants to heal us.

How do we approach? What do we say? How do we make peace with God?

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

He already knows. He’s waiting for us to “give it up” ..to tell the truth ..to trust Him. **And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.** Don’t forget the punishment for sin (I sound like a Baptist) The wages of sin is death ..the reward is permanent ..one way or the other.

Along with the other choices we make with our free will ..we are able to choose the path we will follow in life ..but we must remember as we make those choices that there will be a final accounting. **Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

We can make the choices that will bring us peace with God if we strive to live in harmony with God’s will. Sin is a deliberate turning away from God ..his authority ..it disorders our relationship with Him. In Isaiah 48:22 the Lord says **There is no peace for the wicked.** There is hope, however, in Christ. The Son of Man, Matthew tells us, came to save that which was lost. By dying Christ regained for God all mankind who were lost. We owe a tremendous debt to Jesus.

We must begin by recognizing our need for forgiveness and accepting that no sin is too great. The self help programs designed for those addicted to alcohol and drugs recognize that for many bottom must be hit before realization of the need for healing is understood.

Is that what its’ going to take? Must we “hit bottom” before we can reach for the heavens? Suppose we mess up ..slide back into our sinful life ..replacing the God of love with the gods of our culture? If we pursue our sinful pleasures with the kind of gusto that the TV commercials urge ..if we seize the moment for ourselves and forget God.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way.

Our hope remains in the Jesus, Christ. **He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and BY HIS BRUISES WE ARE HEALED.**

If our only experience with peace talks is those held by governments after wars then making peace with God will be an eye opener. He wants it. God reaches out to us in Jesus Christ to restore us. If we're honest with ourselves, our lack of peace convinces us of our need for forgiveness and reconciliation with our Creator. What shall we do? That question has come down through the ages ..St. Peter's response echoes in our ears REPENT. St. Paul said "repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of repentance.

To be at peace with God we must turn back to Him ..we must agree with Him ..we must bring our lives into harmony with His will.
Don't put it off until tomorrow. Let's roll.

We are offered the help of the church. Instruction in the word of God ..preaching from the Gospel ..Sunday School ..Adult forums ..worship ..the sacrament of penance ..and the life transforming Healing of our Lord and Savior.

The guideposts then are: Go to Church. Confess your Sins. Pray for Healing ..accept that the healing you get may not be the one you expect.

Life is what happens while your busy making plans ..don't let your life slip away from you ..don't permit the convenience and pleasure of sin and evil to distract you .. Trust God ..give your sins ..the little ones ..the big ones ..the ones you haven't even identified ..Give them up to God.

For some time now, as I try to meditate on God's love ..to fulfill my vow of spending at least an hour in meditation ..I am provided with an often vivid recollection of my sins ..and I am a might sinner. I see people and places and actions ..I've been brought to tears more than once ..realizing what I've done ..how I've sinned ..and **how much God cares**. He sacrificed His Son ..so that I wouldn't slip through the cracks.

Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

GOD IS ..and that's enough.

AMEN