

**“His Story - Our Story”**  
Homily of April 30, 2006  
by Fr. Aidan McAleenan

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What we hear this morning is the story, if you were to compact three readings and put them together, give a succinct version of Catholicism and our Christian faith. And if I were Pope (Who’s laughing?!) I would turn it around, so what I am going to do is turn it around anyway. We have the pastoral prerogative to do that, Father. Don’t we? And so, we start off with the reading of the gospel. Here you have a gospel that we heard, the road to Emmaus, how our hearts burned within us as he told us about the scriptures, how we recognized him in the breaking of the bread. What is that but the Mass? That is the Eucharist that we celebrate every Sunday. We hear the word of God and then we receive God in the reality of the Eucharist, and we take that out into our lives.

In the reading of John, here we have one of the most succinct versions of Christianity, that Jesus Christ points to the Father and the love of the Father and that each of us is called to love God and love one another. This is the fulfillment of the law, not necessarily the six hundred thirteen laws of the Torah or the ten laws of the Commandments. But if you do these two things, if you love God and love your neighbor, then all the rest of the good law underneath it that is in our state and our Church and all the rest of it, sort of flows up to it. And that is the measure of our conscience to decide whether something is good or bad in terms of law.

Now the changes that must have taken place in Peter to have been the one to deny him three times and have this Resurrection experience, to have cast off the doubt and believe in the Resurrection, in the risen Christ, and to go out and to change the world in the way that he did and they did, both those men and women, (We are having feedback back here. Is somebody listening to me? That’s not the Holy Spirit working through the microphone system.) So it is the Holy Spirit working through what Peter did. These things changed these peoples lives in a very powerful way, both all of the men and women, the disciples of the early Church, right through martyrdom and sort of believing so firmly and so strongly in what Christ had done for them.

I think I see those changes when we had twenty-seven people on Holy Saturday night in this Church step up to the plate and become Roman Catholics to become part of our faith community here at Christ the King, part of the Roman Catholic Church. And there’s something really wonderful about that because when you see these people make these decisions, when you have, as our RCIA team have and as a faith community, listened to these people’s stories, walked with them and come to this moment, it ‘s a very powerful moment. And I see a lot of them here this morning. It’s a wonderful gift. It’s a transforming moment in your life, and your life is never

quite the same again. Isn't that right? (asked of a woman in the congregation) OK. (She was just baptized. She's a new baby Catholic, so she understands what I am talking about!) So, our lives are transformed when we hear the gospel, when we break open the words, when we take God into ours and the Eucharist, and we carry that out into reality. We are missioned to make a difference. We are missioned not just to have faith, as you hear in the gospel, but to actually do something with it, to actually make a difference in our community and in our American community and in the greater community of the world.

So, this morning, you are going to have an opportunity to do just that. You are going to walk through the gym when you walk out of here and we have about forty different ministries showing their wares, not in the Church, but over in the gym. And you get an opportunity to see all the giftedness Every single one of us through our baptismal gifts, has a gift to offer to the Church, everything from praying for one another, for the community, to actually doing something. If it means over there, pressing the button every Sunday to make the projector work, although we are getting PowerPoint soon. So you'll be obsolete soon. No, I'm just joking. There will still be a button to push to make it work. But there are lots of things that can be done in this community. RCIA just worked all the way from September for twenty-seven people from all those who weren't baptized in any faith to different faith traditions you have the people that give out communion, Eucharistic ministers. There are over forty different ministries. So everybody here is called to do something. I don't know what it is. You have to decide.

Those changes that happen in our lives can be a little surprising at times. When I was at St. Bonaventure (At the end of every seat you will see this little Christ-Light application. Don't be looking for it right now. It's an opportunity that we had - We called in Bonfire - It's a Cursillo movement that's done in a parish over a weekend. We're having ours on May 26th and the 28th and we are calling it "Christ-Light.") as a seminarian, I had to go to this. The pastor said I needed to go, and as an obedient seminarian, I went. But I did not like the idea of it. I went the first night and sat with my arms folded. The body language was good. The legs were crossed. And I just thought these people were wacky! Because it was a different sort of expression of faith in the Cursillo Movement. But, as the two days progressed, what an experience was fifty people who had come together for weeks before, put together these faith talks through their own lives, told their stories. These faith stories really made a difference, so much so I never understood what St. Bonaventure was about until I realized that about five hundred fifty of the parishoners, the core parishoners there, had done this and had this faith experience. So, when I went to Mass on the Monday morning after, you had to look at the other people. You could see the ones, there was a knowing look, that this experience of God in Church could really change your life. And you could never be quite the same again. So we have a few things. We have the baptismal change in people. We have the change that could happen in your life through some experience in the Church.

And then you have the practical things that happen in your life. Five years ago, I got a tumor in my parotid gland that produces saliva, and I just was squeezing and getting on (I was always prone to acne so that's what I thought it was.) Turns out it was a tumor. I had to have it removed.

So everytime I get my photograph taken, I get this side taken because I have fifty stitches down this side. It's a good stitching job, isn't it? But I always get the picture taken on this side, and, at that moment, when that test went off and the tumor went off for the oncology test they do, I prayed really hard that few weeks. And those few weeks seemed a really long time. I could taste water. You never stop to taste water, but you could taste the water. The fresh smell of walking in the breeze, the simple things of life were important. You really sort of cut through the bull, if you know what I mean. You're not prepared to really deal with some of these big things. You are really focused in on life and love and the people that love you and the way that you love other people. And so, that one passed. It was benign. And I came to eighteen months ago, and another one grew on my shoulder, just under my collar bone, the size of my fist. And I had that taken out and again had to wait on what it was. It was just a fatty tumor. It was benign. And then a couple of months ago, it grew back. And, on Good Friday, I was sitting and waiting for my Cat Scan. So everybody was getting ready for Church here and I was over there at Kaiser. I was sitting, reading the paper. You know these things you have to fill out that say all the things that can happen to you when you do these procedures? And me, being a shy person, sitting there, going, "OH my God! You could die from this!" And the other ten people in the waiting room are like, "Well, we read it. We know." I go back to have the results on this Tuesday at four o'clock. The doctor told me he thinks it's just a fatty tumor. We just have to get the root of it and take it out and that will be over with. But it really does change your life, these things, in a way because you realize how fragile life really is. And we really don't always live in the present. Not sweat the small stuff. Dealing with the reality of life and being very present in the reality of our lives. Being missioned to love and be the most loving and caring person we can be.

And you know what? Our Holy Father is spot on. He has produced an encyclical "God is Love." It is absolutely wonderful. It is a real gift to the Church. The beginning of it is a little "intellectual" but the rest of it is just so practical, talking about the need and the love of God and the love of God in our lives and how practical and how real and how wonderful that experience is. It's what we are talking about. It's what God is.

Now, I have to ask for your forgiveness. Why, Father? (... Why, Father? the congregation asks.) Because I couldn't get this in time to come from St. Anthony Press so I had one and I photocopied it. Is that OK? You don't mind? It's the same information though, you know because of copyright laws, it's bad to do these things. But anyway this is a real gift to the Church. It's actually done succinctly. It's sort of brought down to four pages. And it's a wonderful gift. So, our gift of love to the Church, our missioning to do something different, looking at the changes that can come up in our lives forces out into mission and to be loving and caring people. Tomorrow, we are asked to be loving and caring people. When I am in the confessional at the back or wherever I minister the sacrament of reconciliation, I always add a prayer focused in on the person. The Church asks me and all priests to say, "Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace." And I always add whatever the person is worried about and "May God grant you the gift of love for yourself, for your family, for everybody you meet along the way because Christ and God our Father is in the pattern of every single human heart." That is a fundamental belief of our Catholic faith.

And so, tomorrow, when we are thinking about immigration reform, I myself was illegal in this country for five years. I came here not intentionally to be illegal. I had a student exchange visa. I was leaving the seminary in Ireland on Monday morning with my bag and five hundred bucks in my pocket. I got a flight to San Francisco, and I spent working in this area, mowing lawns, doing lawn maintenance and building decks. And at the end of it, I realized "I like it here." And lots of my friends were Irish and illegal as well, and Mexican friends that are illegal. They are all alike. Well, just stay. Pre-911 that was easy to do. I was driving. I passed my driving test. I had a social security number. I had a bank account. I was paying my taxes. I was doing everything I was supposed to do, but now on the stroke of midnight on October 14th, I was now illegal. I thought the Immigration were coming to my door and I was totally paranoid. But what ended up happening over the next five years was it was really a horrible experience because when my parents got sick, I couldn't go home. I did go home one Christmas and I think I nearly drove my parents mad by just being so uptight about going back. By the way, this is an American passport (holding up his passport.) It has my name on it and it's the real thing. You want to verify it? (laughter... The holy cop. You're the best one to verify it.) Now, I have dual nationality and I can go and come as I want.

But for all of the people who are here for one reason or another, who find themselves the twenty million (And it's way more than twenty million! There might be twenty million in California...) But all of these people, what are you going to do with them? I mean it is really unfortunate. I think it's really a travesty of justice that this issue has been brought up at the White House and Congress at a moment when it is deflecting from the real issues of what's going on in Iraq and the two thousand four hundred man and women that have died. (Applause!) That is really unfortunate but I think this is the thing that we need to fix. It's unfortunate that immigration reform comes up in this context. But, what I would suggest to you is I would hope and pray that we would pray, even no matter whether you're on the left or the right, that we have an immigration reform bill that is bi-partisan, that is done in the context of every person being an image and likeness of God, that we have something that a strong president would put through that allows families to stay together. I have a friend Marcello that I did his mother's memorial Mass a few weeks ago. He's here eighteen years and he has never been able to go home. And his mom died the week prior to that and he was an absolute mess sitting at the front of the Church. It was hard for me to say that Mass with his friends because it was his mom and he couldn't get to see her because of an immigration policy that just seems so wrong. Now, I recognize... What I would say is that we fix the immigration policy now and then we sort out how. But you know what? If big business didn't want us, didn't want to have all the work, it would have been fixed years ago. There is a need in this country for this type of labor. So we need to treat people well and we need to fix this problem. So, I would say tomorrow at six thirty at the Monument Crisis Center, there is a peaceful march, going to march over to St. Francis Church. It's legal, and it's the right thing to do I think. I'll be there. Everyone is invited to participate in that march to pray for the right thing to be done. And I think in our faith tradition, that is all we are asked to do, to welcome the immigrant, the stranger and all people. Don't forget that all of us are only a generation or two away from the immigration experience. The Irish, for example, need not forget

that it said in New York and Boston and Chicago, “Irish need not apply.” or “Catholics need not apply.” because there was a big discrimination in this country, up until the forties and fifties and since that time, we have become very American as an American Catholic Church. But we need to remember our roots. We are always just a little bit away from that experience, and we want to do the right things. So we will pray that we will do the right thing. So let the Church say “Alleluia!” (“Alleluia” in response from the congregation.)....