

“CALM”

Homily of August 20, 2006

by Fr. Michael Dibble

A few years ago, when you and I were here together, on a Sunday, I told you about a sign that I saw in a garden in London. London has many small parks, many of them half the size of the church, many little parks with benches and trees and when I was there in '74, I saw a sign on a tree, and it said “Commit no nuisance.” I thought, “Oh! How perfect!” It’s so inclusive, “Commit no nuisance.” That includes anything from dropping a candy wrapper to thermonuclear war. “Commit no nuisance!” It’s so inclusive, and so British. And today, in the first reading, the Book of Proverbs, which is a collection of wise sayings, there are the two words, and I hope you don’t mind if I use the Jewish inflections of a friend of mine in Columbia University. “Forsake foolishness!..... Forsake foolishness.” It’s in the Book of Proverbs. We just heard it, and like “Commit no nuisance,” it’s so inclusive. “Forsake foolishness!” Not many of us at Mass here are serial killers. Most of our sins, I think, having been a priest a long time, are so foolish. They’re foolish. And in Proverbs, three thousand years ago, the very wise Jewish lady or man who wrote it said “Forsake foolishness.” Commit no nuisance.

Our acronym for today is very short. It’s CALM, calm. Forsake foolishness. Stay calm. C is Christ. A is Appearances. L is Lose, lose something, and the M is Meditate, which is not a word that should scare us. Christ, Appearances, Lose and Meditate.

CHRIST: Forsake foolishness. Our Lord reminds us we are living in two worlds. If you didn’t believe in a world beyond this one, I don’t think most of you would be here on a Sunday morning, at this hour. But there’s two worlds. And Christ became part of ours and to remind us that there’s another one, one that lasts forever. It’s going to be very happy. Two worlds. And he was so common sense about how to live in this world. Notice how many things Our Lord tells his apostles that are just good common sense. Forsake foolishness. Remember, he tells some people, “Why are you heading for the best seats at the party?” Don’t do that, clomping up to the best seats, because the host may come and say to you, “Step back. I’ve got a bigger shot than you to sit here.” Take the last seat and then you’ll have the dignity of someone saying, the party owner, “Come on up.” Just don’t be so arrogant and so pushy. That’s Our Lord speaking. On another occasion, remember the lady is hauled in front of them, clutching a sheet, and she has been caught in adultery in this world. And Our Lord says, “Anyone among you bunch who never committed a sin, you can throw a stone at her.” And they all kind of creep away. And then he says, “Did nobody condemn you?” She says, “No one, Lord.” And he says, “I’m not going to either.” And she starts to go and he says, “...But don’t sin anymore.” Forsake this foolishness. Look at the mess you’ve got into. Serious....

A guy called me from New York. You know, all of his life, this week, all of his life, Catholic education, he's just discovered Christ! I mean really! You know how sometimes you hear something at Mass, and it hits you at last. Oh, I get it! Well he was reading the gospels. They don't call me up to show off. He was just calling to say hello and all that! He said he just came across the gospel about this world and Christ. Remember a little girl has died and some big shot comes to Jesus and says, "Would you help me? My little girl's dead." and Our Lord walks in and there's a big crowd. Our Lord says to the little girl, and they actually use the Aramaic in the gospel, "Talitha kume." That means, "Get up, little girl." And she does. She comes to life and then Our Lord says, "Give her something to eat." That really hit this guy in New York. He's in his fifties. "Isn't that great that Christ says 'Give her something to eat'?" It's so common sense and beautiful. Forsake foolishness. Why are you all gaping around, going on talk shows? Give her something to eat.

Now the second part of CHRIST is the other world. That's why we're here, basically. I don't blame those Jews in today's gospel. "How can this man give his body to eat? What is this, a metaphysical cannibalism? What's he talking about, I'm going to give you my flesh?" ...I'd be with them, be right with them, objecting, and this is ridiculous. Foolishness. In the seminary, we had to study the Eucharist.... "Is it transubstantiation or consubstantiation? Or which particular theologian has the best metaphysical and philosophical grip on the mystery of Christ actually being in a piece of....." Forsake foolishness! I heard a lady in Safeway, this week, say to her little girl, "... Because I said so. That's why." She said it three times, "... Because I said so. That's why." Well, how can Jesus be in the Eucharist? Because he said so, that's why! Nobody's been able to explain the Eucharistic real presence of Christ, and the thin fragment of bread is not just a cracker. "Take and eat. This is my body." Gather together as friends believing in me, as you just did for the eight o'clock Mass and share the Eucharist. This is I. This is Christ, not just a cracker. But, explain it! Forsake foolishness. He said so. He said it was true. We live in two different worlds, you and I. And Christ lived in both.

Second is APPEARANCES. You know, judging by appearances, you've heard that since you were a little kid. So have I. "Don't judge by appearances." When I'm sitting over there on Sunday, and I'm looking out over you, my father as I told you, was a cartoonist, and I tend to see balloons over heads. I see somebody over there, (I don't even know these people.) "What's he thinking about?" He's human. It's at Mass, one of the few times in the week we can actually be a little bit of quiet. What's he thinking about? I know. I'm over there, judging appearances. "He's thinking about donuts.... After Mass, jelly or glazed?" He's human. He's human and he's hungry. He's still in this world. And, over there, what's she thinking about? I don't know her. "Am I going through an adolescent crush at my age? Is it really love at last or just an infatuation?" And all through Mass, that's all her obsessed heart can think about. And, over there, "Who do they think they are, telling me that thing on the job on Friday. I'm knocking myself out at this job. That bum!" Judging by appearances. It's so human. And Our Lord says, "Don't do it." At least, don't do it harshly. If you judge harshly, you will be judged harshly. Our Lord said that. Isn't that a great contract? It's rather beautiful in a way. You don't

judge harshly, or if you do, you stop yourself. And then you won't be, when you face him. You won't be. I promise you.

There was a girl.... (I always get permission to tell you these stories. I do. So don't be, "Oh, I'll never talk to that man. He will tell my story!") There was a girl in senior year of high school, many years ago, and she was crazy about this guy. "Oh, he's gorgeous!" she said. Of course, I was immediately jealous of the guy. "Oh, he's gorgeous!" I've always felt that way about hats and people, beautiful girls... Well, yes. What else? "But he's such a snob. He never stays after school. He never talks. He never joins sports or any kind of a club. He gets right on the bus and he goes home. Snob!" What she did not know is this kid, his parents were chronic alcoholics, both of them, and they owned a farm. He got on the bus right after school and didn't join sports or clubs because he had to get home, help his two kid brothers on the farm, all through his senior year. That gorgeous snob! Don't judge. You can't. Even if it is a good judgment.

In 1974, I got a wig. Well, it was a small one, a hairpiece, about the size of my fist, little one to go up here. My rationalization was "Well, I'm teaching high school and college and if I'm getting old and bald they won't be able to relate to me." Talk about sophisticated rationalization of middle age vanity! So, I'll get me a hairpiece, a little one. And every day, you stand in front of the mirror in the morning with a mirror here and there and you comb it so it looks natural. And I heard later that this very holy French Canadian Marist brother who was on the faculty with us said "The reason Father Dibble looks eternally young is probably because it's like the preservation of the saints' bodies after death. He stays looking young because of his virtuous life." He was a French Canadian and very naive! And very sweet and kind! And very wrong. I'm preserved because of my sanctity. Soon as I left teaching, I ripped it off. Thank God, because then I came to San Francisco and faced the winds.

When it comes to appearances, Our Lord makes the common sense promise: "Don't judge" (meaning harshly) "and you won't be judged." Whether for good or ill, we can't read the inside by looking at the outside. Thank God, we can't. Only Our Lord can. And that includes us.

OK. We are up to number three: LOSE. Lose it. Lose old sins, repented, forgiven, absolved. Lose them. Old resentments, try to lose them. You can't forget them, but try to lose them from always hurting and wanting to get back. Again, you've known this since you were children. Forsake foolishness! What good is it doing you? Now, in my generation, a lot of the young were tormented by scrupulosity, especially about anything about carnality, the sixth and ninth commandments, tortured by scruples. Scrupulosity! Now, it's more "anything-goes-ity." But in those days, people coming back to confession over and over and over.... about the same thing, particularly about anything carnal. Not that they aren't sins but to torment you for years... This is from C.S. Lewis who was not a liberal theologian. "Well, C.S. Lewis is wishy-washy about sins!" He's not. He's practically quoting Thomas Aquinas who was a highly conservative moral theologian. It's very short, about will you lose the old guilts and the old sins? "If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme evil, he's wrong. The sins of the flesh are certainly bad. But they are the least bad of all the bad sins. The worst sins...." (Now this is right

from Thomas Aquinas.) “The worst sins are what we could call spiritual sins, rooted in pride. They’re intellectual. They’re the cerebral sins.” Fleshly sins, we are quickly ashamed and want to be rid of. But pride sins we sometimes think are virtues. For example, always putting other people in the wrong, bossing and patronizing, acting like Pharisees, the way they treated Jesus, using power to control, using power to humiliate, using power to terrify, using power to crush another person’s spirit. These are spiritual sins, the worst because rooted in pride, and because the sinner may even regard them as virtues. Anyhow, it’s how Our Lord treated different sins. “Sin no more. I’m not going to condemn you.” Repent. You confessed it. Lose it. And lose guilt and resentments as best you can. Stay calm.

The last one is MEDITATE. Don’t be scared by meditate. The word is scary, even to highly intelligent, prayerful Catholics. Meditate. It doesn’t mean levitate. It doesn’t. We meditate all the time, well, some of us. I still meditate about Patsy Collins, of whom some of you are sick of hearing, who broke my heart in the eighth grade. I do. I still have these fantasies and if I had died at the age of fourteen and she had come to the funeral, she would have broken into hysterical tears. I meditate on that. “Oh, Mikey, I really didn’t appreciate you when you were alive....” We often meditate on people that we are mad at. It’s so human. It’s this world. May I suggest, and I have gotten this from you, from the laity.... When I was a kid in the seminary we meditated like this on our knees, like this for twenty minutes a day. No! Three minutes. In the bathroom is the only place you can find refuge. Sit on the bathtub, three minutes. Now, I know doctoral candidates and cab drivers who do this, especially on a Monday, especially on a Monday. When I turn on the radio on Monday (See, I’m luckier than you because I can stay home.) I think of so many of you driving to work, turning on the radio and then you get the big D’s: D as in day, disasters in the world, heartbreak, drivers, a huge truck overturned, twenty-seven bodies scattered along the highway. And the next D is phone numbers for products, 372-8874.... 372-8874.... over and over again and getting louder and louder. And then deafening volume! Couldn’t you turn it off, because you’ve done three minutes of meditation. Here’s what some people have told me, from doctoral candidates to cab drivers. Lock yourself in the bathroom. Sit there quietly, three minutes. I bring my wristwatch. Here’s Monday. OK. Take a deep breath. Now this is going to sound very banal and very corny. Would you try it? “What are three blessings in my life today?” They don’t have to be big things. Three blessings. A TV show I love is on Monday. My shoelace didn’t break. My dog is healthy. You know what I mean, and you remember them during the day. I got this from human beings, not theologians. It’s a meditation. It’s high prayer and it can get you through a day, Monday.... even other days. Three blessings I got despite the tension of my job. Stay calm. These are just suggestions. I get all this stuff from you.

CHRIST, APPEARANCES (Don’t judge.), LOSE the old guilts and sins. They’re gone. Our Lord has cleansed them. And try a bit of MEDITATION. Forsake Foolishness wherever you are, wherever you are. Commit no nuisance. Amen.