

Jan 3-4, 2015

Thoughts from the pastor,

I must really be getting old. I can't believe we are into the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As many of you can verify, I am still not done with the last century. The next weeks I will not have a letter for you since I will be on vacation from 1/5-15. It is good for pastors to get away occasionally, for their sake and many times for the sake of the parishioners. If nothing else you get that second week to catch up on your Bible reading since there will be no class next Sunday, 1/11. Because I will not have a letter these next weekends you get a longer one this week. I hope it will not be seen as punishment but as a chance for me to clarify some things that seem to be confusing to some of you.

I know that many of you are concerned about the race issues that are filling the news the past couple months. It has been a very important issue and very hard to get a handle on because no matter how you speak about it you are accused of not understanding the "other" side. There are all sorts of things that are on the social media that pick one side or another. In defense of the rights of African Americans there are articles outlining all of the atrocities where police have abused their power. On the side of police you have articles outlining what they face every day in all of the violence that they must face as they risk their lives to follow up on a call for help. Many people hope and pray that someday we will be able to look at these issues rationally rather than letting our emotions be our clubs against each other.

In my homilies the past year I have been trying to paint a picture of God's plan for us as outlined by the Gospels using the image of kingdom that is so prominent in the whole Bible. That is difficult enough in a culture that has very little positive experience of kingdom. It is even more difficult in that to speak of kingdom accurately means bringing up gender issues because that is what the Gospels do. At that point there is very little chance in our current culture of not being called a sexist in one way or another. Because of past hurts that are the result of the effects of sins in our past, we tend to deal with these gender issues with our emotions to lead the way. To give you an example that can be considered sexist, this is an issue that is harder for most women than for men. One of the reasons being that most men have been burying their emotions for generations while most women tend to live their emotions far more openly. That is not equality but it is a reality. And I suppose I am a sexist for thinking that it is so often true.

I could do what many priests are doing and just do my best to keep away from any issues that would even remotely come into this arena. The problem with this approach is that the problems will just get worse, because the damage that false ideas of sexuality are producing in our culture are going to continue to grow. This will mean that more emotions will be rubbed raw for many women and more men will be burying their emotions so that the sins just keep on coming. If you don't think that this is really an issue than I propose that you really don't understand what is causing so many abortions, children born out of wedlock, bad marriages and divorces, rapes, and a pornography industry that is growing well past the trillion dollar mark.

Just this morning I caught a portion of a news report on the backlash that was coming because "twitter" is censoring frontal nudity for women. This was seen as a sexist thing to do so some female Hollywood stars immediately posted some photos of themselves without tops. Their reasoning is that Twitter is not censoring photos of men without shirts on. This is a great bid for equality in what I personally see as a very foolish direction. The problem is that men and women do not see things in the same way and these particular Hollywood women are certainly aware of it but in order to get a few more minutes of fame are risking the futures of many young and impressionable women to do it. And I am sure that I am a sexist for thinking that it is dangerous for young women to send naked pictures of themselves out on social media. But the reality is that at their worst, men enjoy having images of naked women to make themselves feel good for a moment. It is called pornography and it ruins the image that men should have of women. Women are not as visually focused so are not as inclined to fall into this particular sin.

What I have been trying to do this past year is lift people up out of this climate of sexual misunderstanding. But just as Pope Francis and most politicians have learned it is hard to deal with these issues in a public

arena. You can have them totally scripted so you don't make any mistakes, which makes them into classroom lectures which bore people to tears. As I mentioned you can avoid the issues and let the problems that ignorance and evil have created continue on. Or you can do what I have tried to do in the past year and take on the issues with some humor and sound images and then take the lumps that come from the pounding that comes from those who feel hurt.

But let me give you some clarifications. I talk of the kingdom in terms of kings and queens, princes and princesses. The king title in our faith is obviously taken by God the Father, King of Heaven, and Jesus, King of the Universe or all creation, until He turns His kingship back to the Father at the end of time. This is St. Paul's teaching if you are wondering. The queen title is given to Mary and Queen of Heaven and earth. This is church teaching in case you are wondering and comes from the Bible, especially the Book of Revelation. If we are sons and daughters within this royal family, which comes with baptism, then we are princes and princesses. These titles are not used by the church very often because we are in training and have to decide whether we will actually accept them. Whether we do or not is critical in our salvation because that salvation actually means living in the Kingdom of God, as His family, which is a royal family.

The big problems come up when I start to actually define the terms of princess and prince. I have tried to outline that a prince in a combat zone is either a target or a soldier. This comes from the Bible also in that the devil is at war with heaven and the battle is on this earth. A prince or a princess is a target in a battle because their loss is more significant because of the position they hold in the kingdom. The idea is that it hurts the king and queen more personally. I have said that a prince can alter his position as target by becoming a soldier or better yet, a knight in shining armor. The reason I focus on knight in shining armor rather than a soldier is because of the violent images we are fed in our culture of soldiers and police. By using the knight in shining armor I introduce the positive qualities that the Bible is trying to train us to use as soldiers. Yes I consider myself a soldier for Christ. That image was given to me in my Confirmation. I hope that I live up to the image of knight in shining armor. When I bring up that men are built like tanks I am trying to emphasize the strength that men must show as they go into battle. They show no strength when they succumb to pornography or show strength in the wrong way when they rape and abuse women.

A princess is also targeted by the devil but in a different way. He does not attack her strength. He does that with a man to make him feel worthless, whether it is an attack on his physical or spiritual strength. Either one takes the fight right out of us. This is instinctive for men. We are built this way, which is why not encouraging men to be the spiritual leaders of families is such a great weapon of the devil. For a woman he attacks their power, which comes from their beauty. This immediately brings out vicious thoughts from some women because they do not want to be judged by their beauty. The problem is that they don't believe men see any beauty besides physical beauty. Pornography can train us to be like that as I mentioned above. But men also want to see many other aspects of beauty in women. Just as chivalry connotes the best in men as an image of strength used for good, so does grace and charm connote the best in women as an image of the power of women used for good. In case you are wondering, all of this comes from the Bible.

The problem is that some of the radical feminism of the past few decades has trained some women to hate these images especially when one other part of the kingdom vision is used. That is that men and women, princes and princesses, are meant to be together. God said it most clearly in the beginning when He said it is not good for the man to be alone. I have mentioned this many times in the past year and its reverse is heard with anger. The statement "No woman is complete unless she has a man to make her whole" is viewed as belittling all women. After all this would be the ultimate sexist comment. But if God did not feel that it was good for man to be alone it does follow that it is not good for a woman to be alone. He did not just make more men that shouldn't be alone, He made a woman. God had a plan and it does not involve us being independent of each other or of Him. We are made for each other; man, woman, and God. The alternative is literally hell, maybe not in this life but certainly in the next. We are made to be in relationship. God is even in relationship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second story of creation brings it out so beautifully in that woman is made from a rib, which comes from the place closest to his heart. We are made from each other

and for each other, but mostly we were made to be with God but we are struggling to get back to that point but we will not be able to do that without being in relationship. The two great commandments clarify that; Love God with your whole self and love your neighbor as yourself.

One of the radical feminist myths is that women don't need men. That is absolutely correct if they have no intention of getting into heaven. For you can't despise half of the human race and say you love your neighbor as yourself. But the same goes for men. But men must love women in that way that Jesus taught us. He taught and modeled a sacrificial love. It is not a dominating love like we have with kidnapers or vicious husbands and brutal "boyfriends." This is not the kind of love that Jesus modeled in dying for us. He was willing to die because it gave us a chance to be what we were meant to be, part of the royal family. When you consider that this is royal family it makes the Army motto of "Be all that you can be" seem almost silly. God wants great things for us.

But there is such a fear in our society of serving each other. We want to be independent. God is willing to let us do just that but He knows how pitiful our efforts will be if we try it without Him. He also wants us to find out how we can achieve more by working together than we can by ourselves. He does not teach us selfishness. So men should be fighting for women to be able to be all that they can be in this world and the next. As the Church teaches, this includes things like fair wages and labor practices. Women should be fighting for men to be the best they can be and not be the alternative to a knight in shining armor, which I call a beast or something that is just destructive and hurtful.

One of the issues that always comes up in this kind of presentation has to do with what is considered the most demeaning work in the mind of the particular person. For some that is manual labor and for others it might be housework. Who gets to do this kind of stuff when we are all princes and princesses? The answer is again in Jesus. He gave of Himself totally. He knew that what was needed of Him most by His Father was to teach and sacrifice His life for us. So He did it. What is the most important thing that you can do to make salvation possible for the people around you? I have been to Israel and seen the kind of work that Joseph would have had to do to serve his family. One project that he likely worked on was building the city of Caesarea. It would have been hot, mind-numbing, bone-breaking hard work. I also imagine that Mary had plenty mind numbing work to do to serve her family also. But service is the key.

The worst of our views of each other as men and women is that all men want from women is someone who does housework and has sex with them, and all women want from men is a sugar daddy. Both are horrible images and have nothing in common with princes and princesses. Because a prince is not worth much if he is not the strongest and holiest he can be and a princess is not worth much if she does not try to be her best and holiest. Each is to lift the other up when they are feeling down. That is why priests or nuns are not exempt from this for we are especially called to lift others up to their highest dignity, getting them to heaven. We just don't choose one partner, something that God does not force on anyone, but once a person does choose a partner He wants him or her to be faithful for life. For that is love that means something, not just love when it feels good. This goes back to my original comparison of this issue and the racial issues we face. Both are dealing with things that have caused a great deal of pain because of sin. But to get past sin we don't just keep on the sinful track. We must focus on being our best and not just attacking whomever we feel is our opposition. I believe Jesus gave us the answer to how we can be our best and I will continue to preach and teach about it. I hope you will help me to do that well. If you have questions or concerns, I want to know. I do not want to preach at you. I want to teach the way of Christ. Teaching is no good unless the lessons are understood.

God bless you all,  
Fr. Frank