

Jan. 21-22, 2017

Thoughts from the pastor,

Not too long ago I was able to read the book, Unbroken, by Laura Hillenbrand. It is the biography of Olympian Louis Zamperini. Simplistically put, the first part of the book was about what a blockheaded kid Louis was. He found out he had a talent for running. His blockheadedness helped him to keep pushing himself to be a great runner. He entered into the military and was a crew member of an allied bomber. He was shot down and survived in a raft for 47 days at sea before being captured by the Japanese. He survived as a P.O.W. and was finally able to go home. Then he made a mess of his life and his family. He finally got things straightened out.

That book became a movie of the same title. I bring it up because it fits the theme of Jesus leading us to freedom. The Unbroken story is helpful for understanding on some of the difficulties that God has in trying to help us to be free to join Him in heaven. God has given us all talents. We also have flaws. God has to work through the flaws to fine-tune our talents in an effort to help us so that we can find true freedom. It is based on the premises that this is not heaven. We are not in hell either. We are in a combat zone. The devil is holding many of us as prisoners and we are chained by our sins.

Our flaws get in the way of even seeing the final goal. We can easily get into the mode that we are somehow going to make perfect happiness for ourselves. This is connected with some people's idea that God is irrelevant and that there is no hell and there might not even be a heaven.

Louis survived growing up in a tough environment by luck and determination. Many of us are in that mode. Many people around the world are in far tougher circumstances and feel like they have been shot down and might feel like they are in their own version of a leaky life raft ready to sink. Others actually feel like they are truly prisoners. They might be prisoners of poverty, abuse, addictions, etc. Louis even survived those kinds of circumstances. When he escaped those night-mares he thought it would be easy. The problem was that now he had to face the biggest test. He had to deal with himself and the people he loved, and who loved him. I'm sure he wasn't thinking that this last part would be so hard. He was wrong.

Many people think that heaven will be easy. You are just loved by everyone so there is no problem. The problem is we carry a lot of baggage. Louis had a ton of it. He didn't know how to forgive. He didn't know how to be forgiven. He was wounded and the medicine he took was not helping. He wasn't traveling toward salvation. He was digging himself deeper and deeper into loneliness and pain. In the prison camp he had an enemy he could try to outlast. When you are your own worst enemy you won't win. You can't outlast yourself.

God is trying to save us. Jesus is showing us the way. He keeps trying to heal us. He tries to teach us forgiveness. He gives of Himself to feed us. And as Jesus does those things, the devil is trying to get us off track and discourage us. He also sees our wounds and pokes into them with the goal of making us give up on ever getting better. We have a hard enough time fighting that battle for our own soul, but trying to watch out for the people we love seems to make it even harder. In reality it makes it more possible to escape. For as long as we are trying to help others, we won't be feeling sorry for ourselves. And being with each other and following the Lord is the plan for salvation. We just have to hang in there. Stay strong.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank