

If you ask almost anyone what they want out of life, among other things, most people will say they want to be happy. Pursuit of happiness is listed along with life and liberty as an inalienable right in our nation's Declaration of Independence. So if happiness is our goal, what is it that will make us happy?

It's probably counterintuitive . . . and it's definitely counter cultural, but there is a truth about happiness that is heralded by saints, Scripture and psychologists.

That truth is this . . . we can spend our whole lives chasing things that we think will make us happy, money, pleasure, excitement. But when we live life seeking our own self-fulfillment, when we get up every day and pursue our own happiness, we end up unfulfilled and unhappy. On the other hand . . . when we live life in service to the highest good of others, always thinking of the needs and best interests of others, we are more often deeply fulfilled and endowed with an unshakable joy that is richer and stronger than any hardship or tragedy we may experience.

The reason for this is simple, being made in God's image and likeness, we are made for love. The only way we can be truly happy is when we embrace that calling to love by following His example of sacrifice for others.

Just hours ago, I received a great gift. I received the sacrament of Holy Orders as I was ordained by Archbishop Jackels a permanent deacon for the Archdiocese of Dubuque. I received that gift along with my 10 classmates right here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. That gift, however, is not primarily a gift for me. The sacrament of Holy Orders, like the sacrament of Marriage, is only fully received when it is given away in service to others. And it is because of that gift, that I am here today assisting Fr. Mark at the altar.

You may have asked yourself before, why we even have permanent deacons, why Dennis and Frank and now why I'm up here at mass. Certainly we are not necessary. Fr. Mark is more than capable of saying mass without me up here. In fact, it would probably be easier if he didn't need to worry about me getting in his road or forgetting my lines.

So why is it that the Roman Missal suggests that it is preferred to have a deacon up here assisting when one of us is present? It is because the deacon is a sacramental sign or reminder of what we are all called to through our baptism, to live our lives oriented to the service of one another. In this way, we deacons are a reminder that mass does not begin when we enter the doors of the church and it does not end when we leave to go on our way. We are not punch clock Catholics . . . punch in . . . punch out.

For each of us, mass began last week at work when we interacted with co-workers, rushing to kids activities, those times we were impatient with our spouse or got angry at the driver who didn't wait their turn at the stop sign . . . I'm sorry about that by the way . . . also that time may for one of you children that you did an extra job around the house without being asked just because you noticed that it needed to be done or stopped what you were doing to listen to someone who needed to talk. All of us bring all of that with us to mass and offer it to God to heal and bless.

Similarly, mass does not end when we leave here today. We are called to take with us what we receive here and allow that to change the way we live our lives through the week.

This is what our scripture readings are telling us today. In the first reading, through Isaiah, the Lord tells us “My word that goes forth from my mouth . . . shall not return to me void, but shall do my will”. In the Gospel, Jesus tells about God the sower who sows his seed in us that we might bear fruit manyfold.

When we come here on Sunday, we receive that seed from God. We receive it through the Word proclaimed here at the ambo. We receive it through the ministers and from each other as we greet and pray for one another and the needs of the world. We receive it from Fr. Mark who, through his ordained ministry shares his life with us. And we receive it in a very real physical way as we receive the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist where we receive Christ Himself, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

Let me suggest one simple way that we can both be seed to others and let the seed we receive here bear fruit for this community and for each of us in our lives. Today, when our closing song is over, before you head for the exit, I'd ask you to consider waiting for maybe two extra minutes. Each one of us needs prayer for our lives. During those two minutes, I'd ask you to turn to someone sitting near you who you either don't know, don't know well, or maybe haven't talked to recently and say something simple like this, “Hi, remember me, I'm Scott. How can I pray for you this week?” Then, throughout the week, pick a time every day that you can pray for that person and their intention. To remind you, you might want to write down their intention as soon as you get home and keep it near some item that you pick up and use every day. Think of the difference that God can make in our parish as we become a people who prays for each other. Think of the fruit God will bear in each of our lives if we can take this one simple step to become more focused on prayer for the needs of others.

Praying for each other's needs is one small way we can begin to clear the soil of our lives so that God can bear fruit in us.

We receive the seed, but what kind of soil does it fall on? If you're like me, probably at different times, you receive the seed in different ways. Sometimes I might be upset about something or focused on my own concerns and I'm like the path, oblivious to the seed. Sometimes I may be like the rocky ground, where I really would like to live for others, and maybe even start with enthusiastic ideas, but I become discouraged quickly and give up? Sometimes I can get carried away in the business of life, always rushing from one event to another and my life is just too crowded for others? But then there are times I receive with a fertile heart that bears fruit empowering me to focus on serving the highest good of those others that God has put into my life.

We all have rocks and thorns that can get in the way of our bearing greater fruit. So how about you? How do you need to let God clear the soil of your heart so that God's seed can grow and bear a rich harvest for others.