

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

6.25.23

St George—Albany, NY

Fr John Vazquez

***Mt 6.22–33***

In the name of the F,S,HS—one God—Amen!

Christ is in our midst!

Multitasking seems to be a way of life for most of us today.

At the seminary where I spent the last three years of my life when I would take our kids outside to play I would often go out with them to “watch” them. When we arrived at the seminary 3 years ago, Josiah was 6 months old, Theo was 2 years old, and Ella was 4 years old—So I had to keep a lot closer of an eye on them than I do now.

Usually when I would go outside I would end up talking to some of my buddies who were also “watching” their kids outside.

These were some great times of community and relationship building while our kids would play together and we could visit with each others but to be honest it is difficult to have an in-depth conversation and watch a 6month old a 2 year old and a 4 year old.

Often, I would realize mid-conversation with one of my friends that I had no idea where my children were. Thank God they have good guardian angels and that God is merciful to me.

It is impossible to do two things well at once—in my case, have a good conversation and watch my kids well.

Distraction constantly shows up in our lives and often we recognize the problems it presents

When it comes to manners we know it is rude to do two things at one time. Think about when someone is texting while you are talking to them or about when someone is talking to you with their mouth full

When it comes to work—it is no secret that focused work produces a much better product than distracted work...Bill Gates, one of the most successful business men of our time knows this...

He sets aside two “think weeks” per year where he goes to a cabin in the woods without phone or email and he thinks about ideas and proposals that people in his company have presented because he knows that distraction will not allow him the focused mental energy he needs to give to his work to stay “on-top” as it were.

The art of distraction show up in other places in our lives too

Think about entertainment—when a magician does a magic trick he often pulls the trick off by distraction

Think about a good thief—if we can say such a thing—when a good thief picks someones pocket he often pulls the theft off by distraction—a bump or a loud noise

And we can think about military tactics—when an army seeks to enter a city, often a diversion or distraction is needed so that some small company of troops can sneak around and enter the city by another way.

We know and recognize all of this and yet how often are we tempted to distraction—why is this?

We are tempted by distraction for many reasons: often it seems harmless, or we think we can handle it, or we simply do not recognize the distraction as a distraction.

I think this last reason is particularly dangerous—we dont recognize the distraction as a distraction. In other words we lack discernment.

Be that as it may, distraction is one of the main ways the devil gets to us.

It is one of the main weapons he uses against us to get us to fall

And it is one of the main ways that our lives in Christ are threatened

So whether we like it or not it is important for us to be aware and to have discernment because our lives literally depend on it.

Our Lord knows this and He tells us today that unless we have a good eye—or another way we could put this is “a SINGLE” eye—unless our eye is single and focused on one thing our whole body will be full of darkness. (Mt 6.22–23)

And then He says, *no one can serve two masters.* (Mt 6.24)

We have the ability to chose who we serve.

If we worry about food and clothing and status and reputation then we are being distracted from our Life in Christ, from seeking the kingdom of God and we are ultimately choosing to serve the devil because we are permitting distractions to come to us.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with food and clothing, status and reputation—but when we worry about them and we allow our attention to be diverted to them and away from

God, then we succumb to distraction and the devil achieves his deceptive entrance into our hearts.

This word—to worry here in the scripture—means that we are occupied with, that we are taking careful and attentive thought about—it means that our attention is giving somewhere it shouldn't be

The devil uses essential things like food and clothing to distract us because these things are important, we need food and clothing to live

But he uses them to consume our attention and then he accomplishes his goal which is simply to keep our attention away from God because he knows that when our attention is on God there is nothing he can do.

When our attention is on God, there is no entrance for him into our hearts

The devil doesn't always come to us with some great evil...but he often comes to us in what seems harmless, in what seems ordinary or in what seems mundane.

But it is these ordinary things, that because they are ordinary and normal can be just as dangerous to us as some great evil in the world, because they consume our mind and hearts

And when our minds and hearts are consumed we have no place left to give to God.

So what can we do?

How do we keep from getting distracted.

Our Lord tells us. He says to us *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt 6.33)*

And what does it mean to seek the kingdom of God?

It means that we do not allow our mind—our attention—to be preoccupied with anything but our Lord because we give our attention to what we love.

And so to seek the kingdom of God in our lives we take up the cross of Christ.

How do we take up the cross of Christ? Well, to say yes to one thing means to say no to something else. So when we say yes to God we crucify those things in us that would take us away from God. This choosing to keep our attention on God is one of the ways we use the weapon of the cross in our spiritual warfare.

When you fall in love with someone, your mind is consumed with that person, how to please them, what are they doing, what can I say to show my love? In other words, it is easy

to chose that person because nothing can distract you from them because of the strong feelings.

But after some time you fall into a rhythm and the newness wears off and the feelings are not always there—and then the distraction comes. The test of whether or not you love that person.

Can we give our attention—our love to God—when we don't feel like it?

Yes, we can, but it takes a crucifixion as I said. We crucify with the cross of Christ the other desires that come to us as distractions and in this crucifixion of these other desires we find our life with Christ—and so there is Life in Crucifixion

How dow we practically live out crucifying these desires or thoughts or distractions that would otherwise take us away from God?

We give our attention—our love—to God through Prayer and Silence

Prayer and silence are how we give our attention to God

Prayer and silence are how we say to God “I love you”

And prayer and silence are how we learn to listen to God

But we should not imagine that prayer and silence are without distractions

No, often our prayer and silence is when we are tempted to be most distracted

And these distractions most often come in the form of thoughts

All kinds of thoughts pop into our heads

The devil tries to do anything he can to keep us from prayer and silence from our turning our attention to God

What do we do then?...

Just ignore the thoughts

Often times our thoughts are sticky—if we touch them—they stick to us and we cant let them go except with a lot of effort

So just leave them be to come and go

But pray every day in the morning and in the evening and let it be with your attention on God

Sit in silence every day for several minutes and turn you mind to God

It is in this prayer and silence that we can give God our attention and that we can actually hear His voice to us.

And little by little we will increase our desire to pray and our ability to pray and we can show God more and more that we love Him and desire Him

And through this prayer and silence we exercise discernment so that we can keep ourselves from distraction—the soul-destroying weapon of the enemy—and we can take up the soul-saving weapon of our Lord—the cross.

May God through his grace and love toward mankind enable us to give our attention to Him so that we can be with Him and experience His kingdom. Amen!