

## **“An Enabling Discipline” (Homily)**

Deacon John Fulton, St. Kevin Roman Catholic Church, Warwick, Rhode Island  
August 25, 2019 – Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time – Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

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**“At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.” [Heb 12:11]**

I was speaking with a very wise man the other day, my spiritual director and confessor, a devout and holy priest. The subject of our conversation, of course, was God, and how He was working in my life: what I **recognized** as His plan for me, what I **accepted** as His plan for me, and, in my confession, what I **resisted** in His plan for me. The wise counsel I received focused on the latter – my resistance, my *childish* resistance – to God's plan.

As I sat there in sorrow, frustrated with myself, my error was clear enough to me, and I confessed it forthrightly, but as to its cause, I groped for an answer. *“Why, Father, am I resistant, why, after all my formation, all my education, my experience, my trust in God for so many things, my recognition of his gifts to me, – grace upon grace upon grace – why am I still resistant to God's plan for me?”*

My confessor responded: *“Many people resist God's plan for themselves because they take the short view of things: the frustrations of the day, the fear of tomorrow, the anticipated problems of next week, or next month, or next year. But God takes the long view: and thus He forms us for a lifetime, for eternity. **Meditate on what God has done for you, not this past week, or month, or even year, but over the course of your life.**”*

And so it was, that while meditating on the course of my life, I read the passage we heard today from the Letter to the Hebrews. As I did – as I thought about discipline, about scourgings and trials and pain – my mind turned to the defining affliction of my own life, a lung condition called bronchial asthma, an acute inability to breathe, except with great difficulty, triggered by just about *everything*: spring and fall, basements and attics, beloved grandfathers (both of whom smoked like chimneys!), laughing, running, shuffling in fall leaves, swimming in chlorinated pools – you name it.

I developed this condition in my fourth year, and was not properly medicated until my 50<sup>th</sup>. In between, I was unable to engage in sports, and thus, feared gym class above all other things, where I was always picked last when we formed teams. (Can you imagine how that feels?) I was bullied, called names I prefer not to mention, and neglected by a father who valued athletic prowess. To round out the picture, I might add that the rudimentary medications available to me were controlled by my mother – a *very* unhappy person – who really didn't like being interrupted by a choking kid.

At the time, it seemed a cause not for joy but for pain.

But as I meditated on my affliction, I realized that it had been a gift, ***an enabling discipline***, a discipline which taught me patience, helped me develop coping skills, taught me to value the important things in life, aided me in accepting failures when they came, prevented me from bullying others – from thinking too much of myself – formed me as a keen observer of people, sensitized me to the feelings of others, prepared me to help others who suffer from afflictions, and attuned me to just how dependent I am on God – for my next breath – and how grateful I am for it. And thus, ***I realized how the discipline of my affliction had trained me, and continues to bear fruit in my life.***

Therefore, I beg you: ***Take the long view of life.*** Meditate on the passage from Hebrews we read today. Reread it, and apply it to your own life. ***Trust in God. Trust in His plan for you.*** And pray for strength. Pray that God may *“Strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees, [...] that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed!”*

**Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13**

Brothers and sisters,

You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:

"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord

or lose heart when reproved by him;

for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines;

he scourges every son he acknowledges."

Endure your trials as "discipline;"

God treats you as sons.

For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?

At the time,

all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,

yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness

to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.

Make straight paths for your feet,

that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.