

Ministers of Care 2/26/2017

(Play Deer's Cry)

Good morning and I would like to thank each one of you for being here today. More so, I would like to thank you for being a minister of care, for making use of your charisms. But let me stop here for a moment to make a distinction between gifts of the Holy Spirit and charisms. The gifts we receive from the Holy Spirit are made for our own personal purpose and spiritual development. These gifts are wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, and fear (or wonder) of the Lord. Wisdom helps us to recognize the importance of others and of keeping God central in our lives. Understanding helps us to comprehend the meaning of God's message. Knowledge is the ability to think about and explore God's revelation in our own lives and to accept the mysteries of faith. Counsel is the ability to see the best way to follow God's plan. Fortitude is the courage to do what one knows is right. Piety helps us to pray to God in true devotion. And finally, fear of the Lord is the feeling of amazement before God. Charisms, these individual powers or strengths we each have as given by God, on the other hand, are meant to be used to build up the church, for the good of people and the good of the world. So much of what we do as ministers of care is to exercise our charisms for the

good of people. Some examples of charisms are administration, encouragement, evangelization, giving, healing, hospitality, teaching, mercy, music, and service just to name a few.

So, what does it mean to be the image of Christ? Let's take a look at this from both an internal and external perspective. From an internal perspective, being the image of Christ is to really tap into the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our own life and to develop our own spirituality, or in other words, our own relationship with Christ. From an external perspective, being the image of Christ is making full use of our charisms in service to the Church of those in need, which clearly each of you here today do in some measure.

There is this synergy that exists between our gifts and our charisms and we must be careful to "feed" both of them. What do I mean by this? Well, we have to feed our own soul just as much as we feed others. Our ability to use our charisms is fueled by our own spirituality. I would submit to each of you the energy that sustains our ministries is "grace". While we are instruments of grace, we also need to accept grace as the source of all things we do good.

Listen now to the Gospel of John, Chapter 15, verses 1-5:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear

fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.

Another word for remain in this passage is to abide. To abide in Christ means to become one with Christ. We become the image of Christ when we become one with Christ in all we do, especially so in our ministries. Being one with Christ allows the grace of God to flow in us and through us.

As ministers of care, allowing God's grace to flow into us is so important to sustaining our spirituality. It is very easy to become so immersed in our ministry that we fail to take time for ourselves. We spend all our time in service using our charisms that we can often forget to nurture our own gifts from the Holy Spirit. I have often been told that we can nurture our own relationship with Christ by taking one hour a day, one day a month, and one weekend a year and dedicate it to spending time with God. Just starting with the one hour per day seems like a daunting task but if we

start with Sunday that is an easy one since we all attend Mass. As far as the rest of the week goes, this can maybe be a challenge for many us given our busy lives. Let me offer up a few suggestions for you to consider how to get to one hour a day. As a part of my deacon candidate formation, we are required to do the liturgy of the hours for both morning and evening prayer. Each prayer takes about ten minutes to complete and they are different each day over a 4-week cycle. There is also a daily devotional called "Our Daily Bread" that many people read. Take time each day to do just a little bit of reading. Find a place in your home where you have a little table and a comfortable chair and just spend a few minutes each morning and evening, or whatever works for you, spending time reading prayers of the Word of God. Listen to the beginning of the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not

the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

The Word of God is Jesus...the Word of God is Jesus. When we spend time with the Word, we are spending time with Jesus. We are abiding in Him, becoming one with Him through the Word.

Now, here are some other ways to fill in that one hour per day. How many of us drive back and forth to work each day? I do not know about you, but it takes me about 25 minutes each way. Most of us have a CD player in our car or some other way of listening to media. Some days I listen to Christian music, some days I do the divine mercy chaplet, and some days I do the rosary, and honestly some days I do none of the above...I just listen to some music from the 70,

80, and 90's! There are also those opportunities to see God in nature and just take a few minutes to see his awesomeness and wonder – one of those gifts of the Holy Spirit! Occasionally, I may stop by the church and visit the blessed sacrament for even just a few minutes. There are opportunities for praise and worship at some churches and certainly daily Mass is available at all churches in our area on one day or another.

The more we do this each day, the more of a discipline to devotion we develop. What you find will happen on those days where maybe you are in a rush or you forget, is that God will gently remind you and you will feel this tug to spend time with him. This is your spirituality at work and the internal perspective of the image of Christ growing in your daily life.

Taking one day a month for God can certainly be a challenge but it is doable. For example, instead of being the person who is doing a ministry or coordinating something, be the person that attends the event. Allow yourself to be ministered to. Listen now to Luke Chapter 10, verses 38-42:

As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

We all must take time to sit at the feet of Jesus while the world is busy around us. We need this time to focus on the relationship that allows us to be the very best at our ministries. Some examples might be attending the Keene Institute series here at ICC, but make an afternoon and evening out of it. Other options are to attending a ½ day or day-long retreat here or somewhere else. There are opportunities all the time to take time for ourselves. Another option is to just spend a day at home watching some Christian movies or reading some good books that help us draw closer to the Lord. It is important that we not fill our schedule with what we want to do and take some

time for what we NEED to do – spend time in the presence of God.

You may be thinking, okay Dave, I have this down and I can do daily and even 1/month things that bring me closer to Christ. But now, you want me to take a whole weekend every year! Say what! Let me share some of the things I have done to accomplish this and in most cases it has been more than a weekend. Go on a pilgrimage. Go on a weekend long retreat like Cursillo or marriage encounter or many of the other weekend retreats offered in our Diocese.

The whole point of this is to be intentional and devoted to spending time with God. While you may not be able to do as I have suggested, work out your own plan and do your best to stick to it. Make spending time with God a non-negotiable to the level that works for you. We make going to Mass and visiting those in need a non-negotiable, so why not make spending more dedicated time with God a non-negotiable. Start small and work your way from there. Make it manageable and create success in building the internal image of Christ in your own life. When we do this, it is that much easier to be the external image of Christ to those we minister.

So now, let's talk about being the external image of Christ to others and making use of those God given talents God

has given to each one of us. I think it goes without saying that each person here today is making use of their charisms to build up the Church and help the people of God. It is probably also fair to say that from time to time we find ourselves in difficult situations or situations where we have no control over what is happening or what the outcome is. Let me share with you a couple of stories.

I was taking Eucharist to the sick and homebound at Yorktown Convalescent one day and the person in charge asked me if I can take the Eucharist to a gentleman who was dying. She was not sure if he would be able to receive but thought it would be nice. I said no problem and proceeded to head down to his room. As I am approaching the room, there is a woman standing outside the room talking on a cell phone and crying. Okay, no problem. So, I open the door and walk in the room and there must have been 25 people in this room of every age...children, grandchildren, and probably great grandchildren. There were also dogs in the room. The entire family had gathered as this man was passing on into glory. It was at that moment that I prayed for grace from God in a way I had never prayed. All the times in the past, I thought I was doing it on my own with a little help from God of course. At that moment, I realized just how insufficient I am without the total and complete

grace of God...that it is always God's grace that is supplying my courage and delivering his message. In the book *Conversations with God*, Francis Hernandez says the following: A whole life energetically dedicated to human task would be fruitless, if we did not count on God's help. Even our most resounding successes will be ultimately valueless if we lack in their execution the desire to accomplish God's will. St. John Chrysostom reminds us further to consider how Jesus Christ teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high.

It gives me pause to think how often maybe I got in the way with what I thought should be done instead of what God needed done. To allow God to be God. Was I projecting my own image or the image of Christ. For me, the answer to this question can often be found in the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. Because these fruits are born out of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, measuring these fruits internally is key to whether or not I am letting God be in control of whatever I do in ministry.

I will share a story with you to illustrate the point. I was the Junior Youth Group leader at Our Lady of Mount Carmel for

six years. We had a great group of kids and we did everything from fun activities to service projects. Well, we had this weekend retreat planned and we had over 60 kids attending and 16 parents helping out. It decided to snow a bit that day and so I headed out to make sure everything was clear for us to go. This was back when the use of cell phones was not very prevalent. Everything was looking good and I was headed back to meet everyone to get on the bus. When I got back to the church, I was told the weekend had been cancelled due to the weather and all the kids had been called and told not to come. I was very upset! The person who had cancelled the retreat was the new religious education director who I had not even met. Who was she to think she had the authority to cancel MY retreat? I went looking for the Pastor who was on his way out the door and I told him how upset I was and that I took the time to make sure we could safely go. He looked at me and told me that "maybe I was too close to this." What does that mean?!? Well, he went on his way and I stewed over that for the next 10 years...yes, 15 years. It was not until a Cursillo retreat that I came to realize what he meant. I had made the Junior Youth Group about what I wanted instead of what God wanted. This was such a valuable lesson for me to remember that God is in control and He had a purpose

for changing that weekend that I will probably never know. What I do know is that the fruits of self-control, modesty, gentleness, patience, kindness...and so on, were not present that day and for many years later with regards to that situation. I certainly was not externally, or internally for that matter, being the image of Christ. Simply put, I was being the image of Dave.

So, the whole purpose of this story in a nutshell is to recognize that God is in control and we have to let God be God. We are not going to have control over the outcomes of situations and sometimes this can cause great difficulty and turmoil. Sometimes we try to find meaning where the meaning is not truly within our grasp. This is why the gifts of knowledge and understanding are so important. We can find meaning in those things we understand and we must have faith in God for those things we cannot understand. As ministers of care, sometimes we can only do what we can do and we **MUST** entrust the rest to the Lord. We must find comfort in knowing that God has supplied us sufficient grace to do exactly what he has called us to do and we must trust that He will take care of the rest.

I had the opportunity to go to the Holy Land a few years ago, I believe it was in May of 2013. We spent three days at the Mount of the Beatitudes. It was quiet and peaceful

after all the tourist left and we had a chance to visit the church there on the grounds one evening. It is a round church with the Beatitudes written around a circle at the top. I found myself deep into prayer beyond what I normally experience. In my mind's eye, I could see myself at the foot of the cross where Jesus had been removed and laid in my arms. I have often wondered what this meant. In preparing for this today, one way for me to view this moment relates back to something that happened at the nursing home one day. I was taking the Eucharist to someone and the lady in the bed right next to her in the same room was just looking at me...her face drawn in...she was frail and thin...at that moment, I knew I was looking right at the face of Christ. As ministers of care, God calls us to hold people in our arms both actually and figuratively. God entrusts us to humbly be His hands and feet, to be empowered by His grace, and to do what we can do and leave the rest to Him...after all, He is God.

(Play Your Grace Finds Me)