

HOMILY

The Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time *June 1, 2008*

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Davison, Michigan

An elderly woman walked up to a little old man in a chair on his porch. Though he looked weathered and feeble, he had a contented smile on his face.

“I couldn’t but help notice how happy you look,” the lady said. “What’s your secret for a happy life?”

“Well, I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day. I also drink a case of whiskey a week, eat fatty foods, and never exercise.”

“That’s amazing,” the woman said. “So how old are you?”

“Twenty-six,” he answered.

If you were going to build a healthy body, you would not follow the young man’s example, would you? Nothing worth having comes too easily. How about building a successful life? Where would you look for guidance?

Jesus said, *“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.”*

The teachings of Jesus are the foundation for a meaningful and satisfying life. Love for God, love for neighbor, love for yourself. Forgiveness. Acceptance. Humility. Kindness. It’s a total package. Christ’s way cannot be improved upon. The well known psychiatrist, Dr. Milton Erickson, was once asked to counsel an elderly woman who was quite depressed. Erickson went by her home and during the visit he noticed three well cared for African violets. Each was a different color and next to them was an empty pot in which the woman was clearly going to propagate another plant. This lady obviously had a green thumb.

Erickson said he wanted to prescribe something for her feelings of depression, but before he did so, he wanted her word that she could fill it. She agreed. Erickson said, “Depression isn’t your problem. Your problem is that you aren’t being a very good Christian!” Startled by this, the woman asked, “What do you mean?” Then he pointed out her talent for growing African violets. It was a gift she was keeping for herself. He told her to purchase pots and transplant leaves to grow more of these beautiful plants. He wanted her to put an African violet in each of the pots and send one of these violets to the mother of everybody born to a member of her church. Then she was to send one to every member of her church who was hospitalized.

She decided to give it a try. She took an African violet to a friend who had recently lost her husband, then another to a family who just had a new baby. Soon, this became a regular part of her life. About ten years later, an article appeared in the local paper. It was titled, “African Violet Queen Dies—Mourned By Thousands!!” Evidently, by living out her Christian faith and sharing her talent for growing African violets with others, this woman discovered a meaningful and satisfying life.

Jesus said, “*Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.*” And how true! The teachings of Jesus are the foundation for a meaningful and satisfying life. That’s now ordinary people like you and I have found so much meaning in Jesus’ way of living for these past two thousand years.

But please note: To reap the benefits of Jesus’ teachings, we must act upon them. It’s not enough to say, “Oh, yes, I’m a believer,” but never put those teachings in practice. Jesus says it quite clearly in today’s lesson: “*Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.*” In other words, it’s not enough to simply believe in Christ’s teachings if they are going to help us live successful lives. We must put them into practice.

We all know it’s true, don’t we? We see celebrities who live by the “if it feels good, do it” credo. And their lives are a mess. Think Brittany or Lindsay or a host of other troubled celebrities. Meanwhile, I look around me into the faces of so many of those who have found a rock—the rock upon which to build their lives

without any moment of regret. Their adherence to Christ's teachings has helped them to have healthy bodies, great marriages, loving families and an enduring sense of well-being. It doesn't always happen, of course. There are forces that can mess with our bodies, mess with our marriages, and mess with our children, regardless of how devoted we are to Christ. But all things being equal, the Christ life is the best life possible. The teachings of Jesus are the foundation for a meaningful and satisfying life. To reap the benefits of those teachings, we must act upon them.

So the message of today is "wise up." The way of Jesus is the way that leads to life. Why not give your whole heart and soul to following him. The sad thing is not that many of us are bad people. We aren't. The sad thing is that we are half-hearted about our faith. Therefore, we reap only a small portion of the benefits God has for us.