

HOMILY ~ JANUARY 21/22, 2023

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

There was a huge clay statue of Buddha in Thailand; and in the 1950's, it began to crack because of the heat and the drought they were having. When the monks came to examine it, they shined a light in one of the larger cracks and discovered that the Buddha was solid gold. Prior to the 1950's, no one knew that the statue was solid gold. The statue was covered with plaster and clay 600 years earlier to protect it from invading armies. All of the monks who lived in the monastery at that time were killed in the attack, but the giant Buddha survived because the value and beauty had been covered over to protect it during dangerous times. We cover our true selves when we feel threatened with our own defenses, fears, anger and aggression. We sometimes come to believe that we are the covering, and we forget the goodness inside. We forget the truth of who we are.

We have a common theme in the First Reading and the Gospel. We hear in the Second Reading: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shown."* Jesus is that light that came into the world. The light of Christ dwells within each of us. When you are covered with your own defenses, fears, anger and aggression, when social media tells you over and over again that you are not good enough, not smart enough, not rich enough, not successful enough ... you start to believe it. We hide the goodness and the gold within us. We forget that we are very good because God dwells within us. God loves you just the way you are. God is with you, God will never leave you and God cares for you all of the time.

There is so much negativity in the world and reasons to feel threatened. However, our faith gives us great hope. We never have to do things alone. We always have God's help. We need to move out of darkness into the light. We have that negativity bias, that tendency to remember and ruminate more upon negative things than neutral or positive things. We can try and limit the negative input, but there are also positive things we can do. God wants us to be happy in this world, and there are things that we can do to become happier. Psychologists used to think that when we have accomplishments and achievements, that this is what makes us happy. As it turns out, when we are happy, we are more productive and more successful. *"The Happiness Advantage"* is what I am going to be talking about during *Coffee and Conversation* on Tuesday, but I want to offer one

suggestion to make you happier, to move out of the darkness into the light. Gratitude brings us out of darkness into the light. I am going to suggest that you keep a gratitude journal. Each day, write down three things for which you are grateful. They do not have to be big things, they can be a hug or a smile, but they have to be very specific to what happened that day. Once you do this for a while, you are looking for positive things each day to write in your journal, so you develop a habit of looking for the positive. Grateful people have better relationships, increased feelings of optimism, better sleep, reduced anxiety and depression, are more resilient and are healthier. Don't you think the minute that it takes each day to keep the journal is worth it?

I also think we need to look for the gold, the goodness in others. Sometimes we just see the clay on the outside that is covering up the gold. The light of Christ dwells in others as well as ourselves. One way to do this is by being more empathetic, which is necessary to have good relationships. Empathy understands a person from his or her frame of reference. We vicariously experience that person's feelings, perceptions and thoughts. To be empathetic, we must be face to face with someone, we need to look into their eyes, we need to see their facial expressions, observe the person's tone of voice and really listen to them so that you can resonate with what they are saying. I think our ability to empathize with others decreased drastically with COVID with all the isolation. I think that is one reason why there are so many divisions in the world. If we empathize, we can find the gold, the goodness. We can get better at empathizing if we work at it.

So, let's move out of the darkness into the light. Let's look for the gold, the goodness in ourselves and in others.

Love and Peace,
Fr. Jim