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**Tuesday of the 5th Week of Lent
Pastoral Ministry Days – Holy Cross Chapel**

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Grumble, grumble, grumble... complain, complain, complain. I wonder what God must be thinking.

In the first reading we see the secularism of original sin displayed very clearly. We have this very vivid story of the people of the Exodus grumbling and complaining as they cross the desert. This behavior, which comes from the very people whom God had rescued from horrific oppression in Egypt under a Pharaoh who consumed their lives and prosperity, is grossly ungrateful. Not only had Yahweh rescued them from oppression, but He provided quail and manna to eat and a fresh stream of pure water (from a rock, no less) to drink.

God is taking them to a land “flowing with milk and honey” where they will be His people, protected and loved. But they are a cantankerous bunch, who cannot see either the nature of their own dependence upon God, or the responsibility of gratitude. They are living out of an entitlement mentality – feeling they deserve to have their needs met.

A worldly attitude desires worldly comforts... and now. How quickly they forget all that God has provided for them! They have a very short memory, but it really stems from the sense of entitlement. The sense of entitlement is the anti-thesis to gratitude and gratefulness.

We cannot be grateful and feel entitled at the same time. It is one or the other.

We see in this reading that their sin of ingratitude is as twisting and venomous as a poisonous snake which kills with its bite, but it can't be recognized until it is lifted up on a pole and each person has to look at it and see his or her own darkness of heart to be “cured” of its effect.

That is what entitlement does. It leads to a darkness of heart – ingratitude... always wanting more.

But there is always a cure for this! There is always a cure for this.

The author of John's Gospel sees in the serpent on a stick of the Torah story as a type or way of interpreting Jesus' crucifixion.

When Jesus, battered and bleeding, is “lifted up” in front of us, it is possible for all of us ungrateful idolaters to see, to know, to recognize, and to understand, through God's grace, the nature and cost of our personal sin and the sin of the world to our loving Lord. Jesus took our sin into His own human personhood in order to put it to death and be the instrument for our release from the sin that condemned Him in the first place.

Our cure comes from gazing on the cross where Jesus gave us everything He had. And He was grateful for being able to do it for us – because it was the Father's will and at the very heart of His own call, His own vocation. He also trusted in the Father's love even though He was not

experiencing it in the moment.

Our continual gaze on the cross of Jesus Christ will lead us to grumble less and to give more – more of ourselves, our time, talent, and treasure. We become more hospitable; our faith deepens resulting in more intentional discipleship

The life of a true disciple [which is what happens when we embrace a life of stewardship] is spending our lives for the Lord. It is receiving what we don't really deserve gratefully. But God is so loving to us and everything is GIFT!

We must receive gratefully and give back gratefully. And we will if our hearts long for His kingdom and not the kingdoms in this world.

In the end, as we all know, but must be constantly reminded because often times it is our default mode in some ways, that life is not all about us. It is about God.

This is what we must teach our children, our young people, and perhaps even ask the Lord to teach us – this particularly in this secular age, in this entitlement world. If we learn it well, we realize that, yes, it is all about God and how He loves us. I doing so, we really come to see how sacred life is.

I recall speaking with a confirmation class earlier in the year the hour before they were confirmed. We got on the topic of secularism. They had no idea what it was – never heard of it. I was shocked. We got into the entitlement discussion. I asked them, “If your parents took away your cell phone, would you get angry?” Of course we all know the answer. They felt entitled to those phones. In fact, those phones possessed them. Whatever possesses us, we cannot and will not give away.

Each day we must pray asking God to give us grateful hearts, to receive all that He gives us gratefully, to let nothing possess us, but His love. To receive all that He gives us – which is everything that is good – with open hands and hearts.

I want to share a true story with you about this. Some have heard it before. It always moves my heart when I share it.

It's a true story about a man on a hunting expedition in Africa. Leaving camp one morning, the man hiked alone for several miles into the jungle where he eventually bagged several wild cranes. Buckling his catch to his belt, he headed back to camp. At a point, however he sensed that he was being followed. Momentarily frightened, he stopped and looked around himself. Following him at a distance was a naked and obviously starved, young boy. Upon seeing the boy and his hunger and need, the man stopped, unbuckled his belt, and letting the birds fall to the ground, backed off and gestured to the boy that he could take the birds. The boy ran up to the birds but, inexplicably, refused to pick them up. He seemingly, was still asking for something. Perplexed, the man tried with both words and gesture to explain to the boy to pick them up... that he could have the birds. Still the boy refused to pick them up. Finally in desperation, unable to explain what he still needed, the boy backed off from the dead birds and stood with outstretched and open hands... waiting, waiting until the man came and placed the birds in his hands. He had, despite hunger, fear, and intense need, refused to take the birds; he waited until they were given to him. Only then did he depart with them.

This mindset or heart-set of this boy must become ours. It returns us to that primordial spirituality that Fr. Darrin has spoken to us about – receiving everything from God with open hands.

Will that be our posture before the Lord? To open our hands to receive His love in the many ways in which He shares it; to open our hands to receive the challenges in life that He lets come our way; to open our hands to receive the crosses which he places there as well. These are all gifts that lead us to a deeper love and self sacrifice – but only if they are received gratefully, knowing that in everything from God there is grace.

We are about to enter into this sacred intimate encounter when we come up to receive Him in the Eucharist. We approach Him to receive his very life with open hands....and hearts. We have no right to Christ's body. It is a gift of love to be received. This is precisely why we should never take the host, but wait until it is put on our tongue or placed in our hands.

The Lord owes us nothing. We are entitled to nothing. But because the Lord Jesus loves us so much, He has given his all and more... His very life... here today... in this Eucharist.

Really, in the end... ..WHAT MORE COULD WE POSSIBLY WANT?