

Homily022320

## IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO BE HOLY?

I am not a great devotee of today's music scene although I know the names of some of the entertainers. I know who Justin Bieber is even if I cannot name any of his songs or describe his singing style. I have a sense of who he is and kind of his life style depicted in the paparazzi press. But yesterday I caught about a five minute interview on twitter where Justin Bieber was being asked questions about his newfound relationship with Jesus Christ. It was very interesting to me. He was talking about being raised a Christian and "believing that Jesus died on the cross for me" but never really getting that, never really grasping the personal implications. For example, he said that he did not realize that believing in Jesus meant that you should stop sinning and begin to live your life a whole different way.

He spoke about how he was not trying to earn a relationship with Christ by doing good things because he didn't have to do that. Jesus had already forgiven him. He wanted to worship God because he realized what God had done for him already. He wanted to show his gratitude. He said that he had around him people who claimed to be Christians but who did not really live the way of Jesus. Did not give him good example. So he just kind of pushed all of that off as something that was spoken about but wasn't really real. He said he was doing pretty much whatever he liked and yet he was in a very dark place. Very dark.

But eventually he met some people who not only believed in Jesus but treated their spouses and their children in a whole different way. It made him want to change and to re-connect with his wife. Seeing their relationships made him want what they had—not what he had. He said that he did not see "Jesus as up on a pedestal but rather down in the dirt with us. And that he reached me in my dirt and he helped me up." I learned that the way to live is to walk with the Holy Spirit. And it is difficult and that he gets tempted every day to lie and be greedy. He spoke of how humanity is broken and that there is so much pain in the world. And that he and other people were looking for hope and a way out and truth. Jesus offers this.

I must say it was a much more humble Justin Bieber than I had ever seen. It was pretty convincing because it was so simple and straightforward. God says to the Israelites: "Be holy—because I am holy." Jesus says: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Be holy. Be perfect. We recoil from such statements. We don't think we can ever be holy—or perfect. We might say: "I am striving to

be my best self.” That is probably what Jesus would say if he were speaking our language today. But here’s the thing. Being holy. Even being my best self is not something that I can do on my own. It is something that must come to me. It is a gift. That is what Justin Bieber said. It was a gift. Being holy is something that I can accept. Not something I can attain. I must receive what the Lord wants to give. Receive it humbly.

My friends, what Jesus offers is a way, a different way to live in this world. Jesus knows there is cruelty, unfairness and exploitation in this sinful world. How we respond to it is the question. His way is different. Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. Don’t resist the evil person. Don’t resist? Does Jesus mean that literally? Not always. But he means it seriously—always. Ask yourself this question: Is the resistance that comes from within me, emanates from within me precisely what the enemy needs from me to gain access into me? Is my resistance like lowering the drawbridge of the castle so that I can go and fight the enemy all the while the enemy is using the drawbridge to enter into my castle and attack me? Can we dare to believe that the way of Jesus, as difficult as it sounds, is actually a profound and very effective way to live in this world? It doesn’t seem so at first. But then... Ask Justin Bieber about what did not seem to make sense at first but now makes such great sense.

My friends, Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. It is a time to fast. A time to pray more and better. A time to be more giving, more generous with our resources and our money. It is a time to look again at this Jesus Christ and his way. And perhaps we too can have a new conversion experience where we realize that the Holy Spirit does live within us. And it is this Holy Spirit that empowers us, animates us, and enables us to live the way of Jesus. AND. To get us out of the dirt and the darkness and live in the light that is Jesus Christ, him crucified but raised from the dead.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.