

In ancient days we would purchase bottles of pop, or soda as it is called out here. It was a glorious time in which pop was made with sugar and came in glass bottles, and a pop top in which an opener was needed. Then when the pop was all gone we would return the bottles, or rather redeem the bottles for a few cents. Those bottles, though empty, still had value.

If you ever want to irritate a priest, when he asks you to be part of a ministry, lead a ministry or participate in something, tell him you don't feel worthy. We ask you for a reason, we see something in you and we think you can be part of something. And when we get that line "I am not worthy." uugh, frustrating; and sometimes false humility.

"I can't." also can be frustrating. I have heard it said, "I Father I cannot forgive..." "I cannot love such and such." "I can't give." Can't or will not?

One of our core values as Catholic-Christians is the belief in the dignity of all human persons. All human persons have dignity, regardless of the circumstance and/or choice a person may have made. This is why we are truly meant to be pro - life; womb to tomb a person is to be treated with dignity.

Sometimes though it is hard to see that in others because of circumstances and choices; and sometimes it can be truly difficult to see in ourselves. When we do not see that dignity it becomes more difficult to participate in goodness; in receiving good and giving good. That is a sadness.

Grace is God's love. Grace is God's Spirit and power. We receive God's grace all the time, but in special moments too, for particular reasons. Grace at its core builds upon our inherent dignity within our nature, and brings that dignity forward. Grace does not make us superior, but truly alive and who we are meant to be. Grace empowers us to do what is right and just.

God graces us because we have that dignity, we have that value. Jesus showed us this value in that the Son of God chose to become human to reveal God's love. If God became human, then humanity is worthy.

Jesus chose to die on a cross so that we would also know that God forgives us. This is our redemption. Jesus wanted us to know that we are worthy by his death.

We then respond to this Grace by choosing to participate with that grace, to live out our dignity. We choose to act on that grace.

In a rare week, all three readings have a common theme.

Isaiah the prophet recounts his vision of God's calling. He experiences the greatness of God and thinks himself unworthy. God graces him; the ember comes to his lips and all that keeps that dignity down is removed. Isaiah responds gloriously...He wants to go and help!

Paul too has that vision. He who had persecuted the early Christians encounters Christ which knocks him to the ground. His sight is taken away until he sees truly and understands the power of God in Christ. Paul responds gloriously. He will go and spread the Gospel to many places and people.

Peter has an encounter with Jesus. He hears Jesus and then Jesus gives him a miracle. Peter thinks himself unworthy, but Jesus sees beyond this and wants Peter to follow him. Peter will become the leader eventually, after repeatedly falling and being raised up himself; his glorious response will take a few years.

God sees each of us truly as we are. God relates to us as God's children, full of potential, with so much capacity for good. God graces us in each moment to build us up, to bring out that goodness. Our response needs to be as Isaiah, Paul, Peter...embrace it, grow and live it out.

One of the saddest things we can ever do is give up on someone, especially a youth. One of the most anti-Catholic things we can do is to give up on someone, to denigrate someone who struggles, who made a mistake. We condemn them to a dismal future, of little hope.

And I have seen communities, people, schools take a troubled kid, surround him or her with love and affirmation, work with the child to teach

them how to live, support them even in mistakes, and I have seen those kids make a turn for the better. And beyond kids, I have witnessed adults become free of their addictions, their anger, their despair and begin to thrive...all because some people took the time to truly see them and believe in them.

God believes in us.

I have also known people who said they “Can’t forgive, love, give..” become renewed and truly forgive, love and give. Their lives freed from the anger and resentment, the loneliness.

We celebrate and give thanks for this each Eucharist. God graces us in the bread and wine that become the Son’s very person so that we can experience God’s love, grow from it, and move forward to become the dignified human person that we are.

Grace builds upon our nature.

So many more need to hear this. Think of how much suffering can be prevented if people believed in their own dignity and so did we. This is what Jesus wanted to do. He transformed people, healed people, with grace, those who were open to it.

Jesus continues to do this in all the sacraments in which Grace is bestowed in a special way. That grace to bring out the dignity, whether those who marry, become ordained, confirmed, reconciled, those who are sick. Grace builds us up.