



Fr. Ron Meyers OMI's Talks



TOOLBOX

We all have tool boxes. My father had not one but several. You see, he was a carpenter – and an electrician – and a plumber. As father of a family of 15, he needed lots of tools to do lots of things. So did my mother. She had her purse, sewing kit, kitchen cabinets and wash closet – all full of things to help her do her work. She had a medicine chest out of which she could pull oils and pills, bandages and tweezers ... to help us cure our coughs and heal our cuts and worse. But they had one more “tool box” – their spiritual kit which contained prayer books, the Holy Bible, rosaries, holy cards, statues of the Saints, pictures of the Guardian Angels, bottles of holy water, blessed candles, and holy medals. (This was way before cassettes and CD’s of blessed song or Videos and DVD’s of inspiring movies.)

But you know, as happens in every toolbox, the tools either get used and worn or they get lost, forgotten, and rusty. Their usefulness becomes limited. So dad taught me to make sure I had one very important thing in my tool box at all times: a can of WD-40. It could do wonders. It would help the most rusty tool come back to life.

In our family spiritual tool box there was a can of WD-40 (spiritually speaking!) I called it WD-PATIENCE. No spiritual tool is of value if it is used without enduring, persistent prayer. You can’t just finger a rosary: you have to pray the rosary (and be patient with your sore knees). You can’t just thumb through or read the bible, you have to pray your way patiently through each phrase and chapter, section and book. Even holy water isn’t magic. Without prayer, holy water is only wet! It only works with prayer that waits on God.

But the purpose of this sermon isn't to talk about our tool boxes ... it is to talk about the TOOLBOX Heavenly Father gave to Jesus. We call it THE CHURCH. We are each of us tools in God's box. He has created each of us for a purpose. It was God's decision to create this world ... and it is God's decision to do his Work with, in and through us. He sent Jesus to restore the life rusted and ruined by sin. But God wanted Jesus to be one with us, to work with us in the divine plan of salvation. We are not mindless hunks of matter. We are humans created in the image and likeness of God, each with an individually God-designed, God-given dignity. As Jesus promised, He and the Father send us their Holy Spirit with custom-crafted gifts to remove the rust of sin, renew the shine of grace and restore us to a useful state ... reminding us of God's plans for us. Traditionally we call these the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. I prefer to think of them as God's cans of spiritual WD-40 ... each custom designed by God with a formula to help us, His beloved tools keep in shape, and/or get retooled/renewed for the task at hand.

Thus it is that WD-PATIENCE helped my folks raise us kids. WD-PRUDENCE helps the anxious person return to doing things at God's speed. WD-AWE fills the bored skeptic into an enthused believer. WD-CHARITY helps the crusty old soul regain flexibility. WD-KINDNESS lubricates the self-centered fixed nut allowing for adjustments to others needs. WD-JOY brightens the darkened spirit with new hope. WD-PEACE restores order to our worldly chaos, etc. What does the WD stand for? Perhaps WonDerful ... for God wants to do WonDerful things with in and through us, his tools ... no matter how dull, rusty and worn out we've become.

Pray then for the gift of God's Holy Spirit designed for you. How will you know what gift (or combination of gifts) that might be? Listen to where you squeak the most often ... spiritually speaking. Just as you know when to use the WD-40, so you will know where you need God's help in your life.

THE WORST SIN

What is the very worst sin? No, I do not mean the most “Mortal Sin” – but the very worst sin? I can think of a lot of very bad things people do. But there is the one thing most of us do most often and think little or nothing about.

I have always considered my mother’s mom, my Grandmother Bragg, one of the nicest holy people I’ve ever known. She’s been dead for over 20 years now, but I remember asking her the above question. She didn’t have to take time thinking about it. “GOSSIP” she replied, softly and firmly. “GOSSIP is the very worst sin.”

She was (and still is) right. Our tongues can be either “good medicine” or “bad medicine.” We can either lift people up or tear them down. We can either heal their hurts or fill their wounds with poison. We can kill happiness by spreading a sadness that is more deadly than a vicious virus.

With gossip we kill someone else ... slowly but certainly. We make the other hurt as much as possible so that we might get as much pleasure as possible out of their pain and embarrassment. Gossip is absolutely diabolical – it is Satan’s special evil. Women do it and so do men. Old people do it as well as teenagers. Laity do it – and so do Priests, Sisters and Bishops. People of every ethnic, religious, economic and cultural group do it. What can we do about this pandemic evil?

The Bible reminds us to ask for the spiritual gifts of wisdom and insight, powerful counsel and the knowledge of truth which leads to the fear of the Lord (see IS 11:1-4). We are not to judge by appearances but rather seek to see others as God sees them ... and thus become witnesses for the Lord in our world, in our day, among those whom we live.

Matthew 5:1-8 lists the so-called Beatitudes – or “Be Happy Attitudes” beginning each one with the words: HAPPY ARE THOSE. To be honest the world offers us a completely different version of what is supposed to make us happy ... it’s as if it turns our bible upside down.

The world says that we will be happy if we have a big screen TV and happier still if our big screen TV is bigger than our

neighbor's big screen TV. We will be happy, the world says, if we drive the fastest car, eat the most expensive food, drink the most high-octane drink, seek the most salacious entertainment, etc. And what happens? You know what happens. The TV becomes a pile of junk. The fast car finally ends up in a ditch. The good food and bottled spirits get flushed down the toilet and their containers litter the landscape. As for the "entertainment" – it leaves us feeling used, abused, violated and miserable ... as well as poor and wretched. The world has an answer: "Do it again. Do more. Upgrade. Kick it up a notch!" We give in and end up feeling even worse, becoming as trashed as the very rubbish we've taken in.

The Bible words come back. We read them ... and at first glance they don't seem to make sense. "Happy are the poor..." "NO, the poor are miserable!" We think. "Happy are the sorrowing..." "NO, the sad are miserable!" We object. "Happy are those persecuted for the causes of God." "Where is this going?" We ask. And then the Holy Spirit gift of insight kicks in.

What we see with these eyes is only the surface. What we feel with this body is only an appetite that satisfies for a moment. We long for what lasts for ever. What we really need to see is what lies beneath the surface ... the real me, the real you ... the real truth ... the real happiness that comes from the real love that God really has for me and you ... and everyone else.

That is why GOSSIP is so evil. Gossip relies on appearances ... judges others by what we see on the outside. Gossip denies the deeper truth: that each of us has been created by a God who really does love us and wants us to get from here to heaven ... by helping others get there too! Gossip attempts to replace lasting happiness with temporary pleasure: the evil delight we get at seeing other squirm in pain. GOSSIP would have us forget the forgiveness that Jesus won for us on the Cross. GOSSIP is the devil's tool to crush God's offer of lasting HAPPINESS by frustrating others into despair. We need hope.

When my Grandmother died, my cousin Mike asked me: "Ron, who is going to be our Rock now?" Grandma had been Grandma to all her 76 grandchildren: the priest and the pusher, the married parents

and those living ‘common law’, the workers and the slackers, gift givers and life takers ... yes, we are a very colorful family. But Grandma showed all of us God’s love. (By the way, even this priest is a sinner and Grandma knew it!) While she might have disapproved of some of our choices and not liked some of our deeds, she loved us all ... indeed, she loved all her family, friends, neighbors and even her enemies (though I don’t think she had many). Now, at her grave, I quickly prayed: “Grandma, help me find the right words.” I turned to my cousin and replied: “And who was Grandma’s Rock?”

It was Jesus – Mike knew it. I knew it. Everyone who had every known her knew it. They knew it because Grandma never gossiped. She never spoke evil of anyone. Out of her mouth came only the good things that came from God. Yes, sometimes the truth she spoke hurt, but it was always truth spoken in love. It was the truth that leads to lasting Happiness. That happiness comes only from God and leads us back to God. Grandma offered God’s Hope to us all.

Banish GOSSIP from your life. Before God, pledge that no matter what others say or do, you will never again speak even one word of GOSSIP. Ask your friends to pray over you for strength to be faithful to such a sacred vow. Speak only God’s truth in love, and know the Holy Spirit gift of hope-filled happiness. It will take you from here to heaven as you help others head the same direction.

POWER CHORD

Jesus has promised to send the Holy Spirit on all God’s people. And today there are many who claim they are “Moved by God’s Spirit” to say and do strange and (sometimes seemingly) wonderful things. Are they really moved by “God’s Holy Spirit” or are they being powered by another spirit?

Today there are many wonderful things that run on electricity. We heat food in a microwave. We talk on cell phones. Our youth play video games on handheld players. I am composing these words on a computer. We are even getting used to the idea of driving cars that use batteries rather than gasoline. But one thing is always necessary: a power chord. Batteries need to be recharged. We need something to

reenergize our toys and tools. Without a power chord, we end up with wonderful things that no more than piles of junk.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. God has indeed promised to pour out His Spirit on us – a reliable source of energy for truth and justice, peace and prosperity. But God has also provided us with power chords which links us up to Him. These are our holy ancestors: our saints and spiritual guides.

In the Acts of the Apostles (19:1-7) Paul meets a group of believers from Ephesus. They are following Jesus Christ as their way, truth and life. He asks them if they have received the Holy Spirit. They reply by saying they don't even know about the Holy Spirit. Paul and his companions offer to become their link to God through whom the Holy Spirit might come to them. They listen to his teaching. They obey his instructions. They let him give them the baptism of the Lord. And then, by prayerfully laying hands on them, Paul allows God to send His Holy Spirit into them. As Jesus asked, the Apostles became God's power chord for Paul. Now Paul, working Jesus' way, becomes God's power chord for the Ephesians.

Obedience to and humility before those who link us to God allows the Holy Spirit to enter and energize us. Who are these links? Traditionally, they have been the wise men and women who have gone before us in faith. In the Catholic Church, they include the Pope, Bishops, and clergy – all ordained for one purpose: to serve us as links to God ... through whom God's graces flow, as if through a spiritual power chord. In God's eyes, also important, are the Saints (all former sinners) who inspire us and intercede on our behalf ... helping us after death even more than we are able to help one another in this life. Some have been officially recognized by the Church, others are known to us as dearly beloved friends and family members. And then there are those to whom, in all things good, God requires our devoted obedience: parents and grandparents, family elders and community leaders, teachers and coaches, mentors and guides. God offers us His Holy Spirit through their experience and wisdom. We need only plug in.

Let me highlight some very important sources in this regard: Saintly Grandmother Anne (and her husband Saint Joachim) and their daughter - the only human who never sinned: the Virgin Mother Mary. While it is true that God can and does send His graces directly to those who need and ask for His help, He prefers to work with us through those who know and love us best. It was God's choice to have Mary be Jesus' mother. God wanted Jesus to grow up like us: in a family, surrounded by elders and guides, teachers and mentors. Through them God helped His Son grow in wisdom and strength. Likewise, God now offers us reliable and renewable connections to the only source of power: forgiveness and salvation: Jesus Christ. He said quite clearly: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Light!"

In Luke 4:16-22, Jesus joyfully exclaims "The Spirit of God is upon me" – as he reads from the sacred texts. We are offered the same reason to rejoice. The Word of God invites each of us to find wisdom and strength, reasons to rejoice and witness to God's marvels in our day. Such a moment is indeed a "day of grace" – a time of happiness to those impoverished by evil; a day of liberty to those held captive by sin, a moment of insight to those blinded by worldly lies ... a real liberation for all who have been chained up and feel like so much used up and left over, unplugged and abandoned junk. To all such, the Spirit of God is but a quick linkup away.

Pick up your power chord and plug in. Respect Mary and all God's Saints. They point the way to Jesus. Obey your parents and holy ancestors. They know what is real. Beware of those who ignore or downplay these truths. Follow the guidance of the Church of God and the good example of your spiritual mentors. Only Jesus brings light to the dark confusion of sin. Pay close attention to the Pope, the Bishops and Priests serving you as links to God's forgiving and energizing graces. Humbly ask for God's help and then offer all you receive to others that they too might be renewed by the power that comes only from God.

GIFTS

I like gifts. In every culture, there are stories and legends about The Gift Giver and the times of gift giving. In order for a gift to be given, there has to be a gift giver: someone kind, aware, thoughtful and generous. There also has to be a gift receiver: someone needy, waiting, willing and grateful. I really like birthdays and Christmas! Wondering about what might be all wrapped up pretty like has always delighted me. Opening the package is quite exciting. Discovering the new treasure is always wonderful. Using is a delight: eating the treat, wearing the clothing, playing with the toy, working with the tool, etc. But there was one more thing ... and I'll get to that in a moment.

In the Bible's book of Joel (2:23-30) we hear again God's promise to pour out the Spirit of God on all people. God's gifts of energy and strength, wisdom and insight, skill and ability are offered to one and all. God is a very generous God ... kind, aware and thoughtful beyond anything we can imagine. God knows us better than we will ever know ourselves. God knows our needs. God is keenly aware that we are waiting for help. The moment we are willing – even the moment we are about to become willing to be willing – God is already offering us all we need. And God is delighted in our gratefulness ... welcoming our words of thanksgiving, cherishing our songs and hymns of praise.

We pray in so many ways: “Lord, send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.” We have learned that only God can renew what has been worn out, raise up what has been crushed, restore what has been destroyed, save what has been lost. In Jesus, the fullness of God's gift - God's only Son, we have been given another chance at life. Their Holy Spirit comes to us from every sacred direction ... blowing hope into doubt, joy in to sadness, light into darkness.

In Ephesians 4 (1-6) we are reminded that we are one body ... the Body of Christ. The One Spirit of God is given to us to restore unity where there has been division. There is One Baptism – our entry into the One Body of Christ ... and we are to act as God wants: reconciled, healing, reuniting all that has been ripped apart by sin.

I cannot not tell you how often people have told me in Confession and just walking around: “I don’t know what to do!” “I don’t know what to say!” “I don’t know where to go!” “I just don’t know any more!” Life is difficult. Relationships are challenging. Situations are frustrating. Others in our lives push our buttons or worse – give us cause for anger, bringing embarrassment and sadness. Violence of every kind brings unbearable pain – to the violated, to those witnessing the violence and even to the violator. But there is great reason to hope – for God knows from all eternity who we are and what we need. God is The Gift Giver Supreme.

Finally, that last thing ... the one that comes after opening the package, discovering the treasure, enjoying the gift ... it is this: **LEARNING THE LESSON.** A gift is as good as the lesson it teaches.

Each gift carries a lesson to be learned ... which, as most of you know, takes time. Wisdom doesn’t come quick ... it takes a while. Most of the experiences that lead to Wisdom take loads of time, much testing, coping with recurring (and embarrassing) errors, repeated corrections and much patience ... but it is always the Holy Spirit who is teaching us everything we need to know.

Yes, we have questions ... and that is good. No one learns without asking questions. No one gains knowledge without feeling the need. No one finds wisdom without first saying: “I don’t know?”

It is possible to receive a gift and really never enjoy it ... to use it up without learning the lesson. Such a gift is wasted. I have often repeated the truth that a gift is never a gift until it is given away. A gift only becomes a gift when the wisdom that comes with it becomes part of you and you use it to help others help themselves by helping others too. (Let’s go over that again: **A GIFT IS YOURS ONLY WHEN YOU GIVE IT AWAY TO HELP OTHERS HELP THEMSELVES BY HELPING THEM HELP OTHERS TOO!**)

As this year’s St. Anne Pilgrimage comes to an end, thank God for the gifts you have received. God’s Holy Spirit has poured out so much on us all. It will take you time to appreciate the fullness of those gifts. And you will come to know God’s goodness toward you as you increase in your goodness toward others. Let the teachings you

have heard become the truths in your daily life. Let the wonders you have seen become stories of faith for your friends. Let the marvels you have experienced become a cause of joy and hope for others. Become the gift that God gives to those with whom you share life and know how precious you are to the God who loves us all.

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