

**April 26, 2009**

--A number of years ago – I guess it was almost 5 years ago now – the Lord gave us a word through Fr. Chris about relationships and how the devil was going to try and destroy this parish by getting between relationships. And, of course, we've experienced that on and off throughout the years. And over the last few weeks the devil has been working overtime – not only in this parish but throughout the church and the community – getting between relationships and trying to destroy relationships. What I believe the Lord is saying to us this morning is, "We aren't to give the devil an inch. Don't give him any opportunity whatsoever." And as I was praying about that this week, the Lord gave me this word. And it's in I Peter – you're welcome to look along – I Peter chapter 3 beginning in verse 8. Peter says to the church, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another. Be sympathetic. Love as brothers (and sisters). Be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult but with blessing; because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." Now, we may think that reconciliation is something that is optional, but it is not. It is something that God has said from the very beginning: the words we heard just a minute ago of the great commandment, "Love the Lord your God." Yeah, love the Lord your God, but it also says, "Love your neighbor." How? "As yourself." And the key right there is this blessing. You see, if we think, "Oh well, you know, I'm not even going to try. They're not going to listen to me" – if somebody has offended you or hurt you. "It won't do any good." Well, you know, we cannot – we cannot make the other person be reconciled with us, but we can be obedient to the word of God. And in that obedience comes blessing. That's what Peter was saying, "In the obedience comes the blessing." Now, there was a situation that happened just this past week where 2 people came – they were reconciled. The blessing wasn't just to the 2 of them. The blessing went far beyond that. And because those 2 people were willing to come together and to reconcile – to lay out their hurts; to lay out whatever offenses they may have received from each other – God blessed them. And through them, the blessing flowed out to members of their family and to others in the community. And – I can't go into all the details and tell you the intimate details of that, but let me tell you – God did a miraculous thing because of the obedience of the saints. And that's what we need to be obedient; to do ourselves. Okay. Now, I want to give you a couple of real simple guidelines that come right after that Saint Peter's passage. One is: if you feel like somebody has offended you, assume the best. This is your brother or your sister in Christ. Assume that they didn't intend to – they may have done it, but they may not have intended to hurt. Just assume the best. And then go to them, and say, "You know what, Jack? I don't think you meant to do this to me, but I was hurt when you said XYZ." BOOM! The devil is defeated! Right then. He has no power now because I've gone to my brother in obedience, and the blessings are going to flow. Now Jack may say, "To hell with you." He might say that - he might say that. I don't think Jack would, but he might say that. But you've still been obedient, and the blessings will still be available. The flow of grace will come. And by that, I truly believe that Jack will ultimately come around. He won't intend, in the future, to say such things. But go and ask. Go to your brother or sister, and just ask. And be honest; and say, "I was hurt." But recognize that the only way you can be offended is if you hold the offense. It's all up to you. You can't be offended by somebody if you don't let them offend you. The hurt may be there, but the offense – if you let go – will never have any power over you. If you continue to hold the offense, then the devil and the other person continue to have power over you. You recognize that? Alright. It really comes down to Matthew 18:15. You've all heard Fr. Nick preach on this any number of times. All of us have mentioned it any number of times: Matthew 18:15. But you go, and you reconcile with your brother. If he says, like Jack did, "Go to hell," then you take two others with you, and confront him and say, "Wait a minute. We've got to reconcile this." If he still won't, then you take it to the church. If he still won't, then you let him be as a tax collector or a sinner. But you've got to remember, this is not about – Remember this brothers and sisters, it's not about you. It's not about me. It's about the kingdom.

And this is a kingdom principle, folks. This is a kingdom principle. If we're going to be warriors in this kingdom, we've got to be obedient to the word. And when we are, then it will all come together. And, really, it's just a simple thing: it's a call to maturity, a call to not hold on to those offenses but to reach out in love to your neighbor and to not let the devil get that end. And to that end, we've got to remember this: Matthew chapter 5 verse 32 when, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "If your brother has anything against you," – not if you have something against your brother, but even if you just think your brother has something against you, "leave your gift at the altar." Then go and be reconciled. Then come offer your gift at the altar. Okay. You may not think you have a problem, but if you think your brother has a problem with you, do it. Go, and just take away all efforts of the enemy to come between you. And so, in that light, let us confess your sins against God and our neighbor. And then we will be reconciled with Him. Then we can take the next step after we do that.

--Yesterday, when we were all praying at the women's thing, I received a word from one of our sisters that she needed even more than before to take authority and tell the devil where to get off cause this wasn't his train. And I think that may be a word for all of us. So Satan, we're telling you to get off! This is not your train! This is Jesus' train, and we're going to heaven. And you have no place. Get off the train.

--I've got this vision in my mind this morning. And we work so hard with God to get through the valleys – to get up to the mountain, but we can't stay there. So we keep getting tossed off the mountain again and starting the journey all over, but Sunday mornings we get to go to the mountain.