

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This past Sunday I was watching the Superbowl with some friends. At one point in the fourth quarter and the Patriots possessed the ball, the down was 4th and 4. This scenario struck me in light of our readings today. We have a goal and inch ever closer to it. We strive to get that first down so we can keep moving forward. Yet, this does not always work out. In football, the pinnacle is the Superbowl championship. For us as Christians, it is to strive each day, in big ways and small, to trust more ardently in the Lord and rely less on ourselves and our human inclinations. There must be balance, to be sure; yet, in the final analysis, it is God who loves us unconditionally and who wants us to be more fully alive in His Spirit in order to do His will. The Lord wants to deliver us to eternal life.

We find, in the Book of the prophet Jeremiah, juxtaposition between self-aggrandizement, self-trust, attachments to human sentimentality and human treasures and one who places his or her trust in Lord. Placing all importance on human trust and earthly things is foolhardy because it never lasts and can be taken away at any time. Yet, Jeremiah tells us that for the one who trusts in the Lord there is no fear even in the midst of obstacles and difficulties. "In the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit." In Luke's Gospel we see this tension or dichotomy between reliance upon God and reliance upon human considerations alone. "Blessed are you" aligns with an attachment to the things of God. "Woe to you" reflects an attachment to human vanity and pride. Jesus is confounding his disciples and followers by showing them the graces that come with detachment and freedom and not the satisfaction that comes with relying too much on earthly comfort.

The Venerable Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. whose cause for canonization has begun, was a New York Province Jesuit priest who was sent to work in the missions of Poland. During World War II, after being accused of being a Vatican spy, he was sent to prison camps and remained imprisoned by the Soviet Union for twenty-three years. In his book He Leadeth Me, a powerful reflection of his experience, he writes: "There were doubts, as one time there was even despair. It was not reason that sustained me then but faith. Only by faith could I find God present in every circumstance, only by faith could I penetrate the mystery of his saving grace, not by questioning it in any way but by fully cooperating with it in exactly the way he asked. It was then, by differing measures and with varying degrees of success, that the glimpses of his providence ruling all things would work to dispel the doubts and the fears that were constantly on the edges of the mind. So I learned by trial and error that if I wanted to preserve my interior peace and joy, I had to have constant recourse to prayer, to the eyes of faith, to a humility that could make me aware of how little my own efforts meant and how dependent I was upon God's grace even for prayer and faith itself."

I invite each of us to pray over and reflect upon these powerful works of a companion of Jesus. Father Ciszek suffered untold indignities and hardship and yet came through it all with a serene countenance. He possessed a deep appreciation of how God was working so intimately in his life even in the most unexpected ways. He can serve as a heroic model for us as we try to embrace a spirit of detachment and finding God in all things!

Father Tom