

Homily for the Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

St. Joseph's Neier/SFB CHRP Retreat/Mass and More

October 11-12, 2014

Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: To be constant in all circumstance of life is the key to sanctity and joy.

*I know how to live in humble circumstances;  
I know also how to live with abundance.  
In every circumstance and in all things  
I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry,  
of living in abundance and of being in need.*

It sounds a bit strange, but I only teach Film Appreciation now at Borgia. I am leaving Theology to the “holy” ones. Whenever I mention this, everyone always asks: what are my favorite movies of all time? One of them I will be showing next week in class: Cool Hand Luke. “What we have here is a failure...to communicate!” Brilliant!

My other favorite film is a movie that I not only liked, but that influenced me and the life choices I inevitably made. I use it in homilies a great deal. You have probably heard me talk about it before. Sorry. It is called *A Man For All Seasons*.

*I think that when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their public duties, they lead their country by a short route to chaos.*

*A Man for All Seasons* is the story of the life and martyrdom of St. Thomas More. More was an amazing human being, smart, quick witted, funny, talented, and most of all a man of enormous integrity. These qualities made him well liked and admired. They also are the reason why he inevitably was beheaded. More rose to the highest level of English government. He was arguably the second most powerful man on the face of the earth. But politics has a way catching up to people of integrity and honor. When Henry VIII wanted his marriage dissolved and eventually left the Church, More couldn't serve him anymore. He decided just to quit without much fanfare, without making enemies. But when a man of honor, a man of integrity, a man of genuineness leaves your side, it speaks volumes! More's resignation was both embarrassing and awkward, for Henry and for England. They desperately tried to get More on board. And this desperation led to his imprisonment and conviction, a conviction based on flat out perjury and lies.

So the title refers to the fact that St. Thomas was the same person, in and out of season. He was the same whether in a seat of power or a jail cell. He was the same whether with his family or with the king. He was the same judging great things or small affairs. He was the same showing hospitality for the king at a dinner party or showing his neck to the executioner. In effect, he lived out our second reading today:

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This is the kind of person I long to be. I am not quite there yet. But at least I know what it looks like. It looks like *balance*.

First and foremost, it means not getting all bent out of shape by troubles. Everyone has troubles, everyone has difficulties, everyone has trials. Some greater than others, some caused by others, some caused by our own bad choices. Taking them in stride is easier said than done. I have gotten better at this. It used to be that every little problem, every little thing that didn't go my way got me all in a lather. Maybe it is old age, maybe I just don't care anymore, but I find myself not getting all bothered by it. But then there are times when good old angry Kevin sneaks in. And sometimes it can be some of the most trivial nonsense imaginable. So how do you go about keeping your cool? I have asked myself the question: Will this be important 20 years from now? 99% of the time, it won't be. Sometimes having a bit of perspective is important. Another thing I try to do is to be aware of the times when I seem to lose my cool. There are a number of things that simply do not bother me at all. I can roll with the punches a lot. But I also know things that can press my buttons. For instance, technology. I like to think of myself as a bit of a technonerd. At school, we rely heavily on tech. But when something doesn't go correctly, watch out. Last year, we were visited by a group that was evaluating our school. I had my class planned to the second. It all relied upon a video that we would watch and then respond to. A minute before the class was to begin, the video got eaten by the machine. Angry Kevin, from out of nowhere, was now in charge of the class. It is important to learn how to deal with our anger, how to deal with difficulty, how to respond when things don't go quite right.

Similarly, it is important to know how to handle success. At first glance, this would not seem to be such a problem, but it can be. Normally people go in one of two ways. Either they let their success go to their heads and become obnoxious to all around them. Or they simply do not know how to enjoy their success and miss the moment. Once again, it is good to be balanced here. There is nothing wrong with drinking in the moment. These things are gifts and a gift begs to be appreciated. Nevertheless, I think it is also good to take our successes in stride. Be grateful for those who helped you. Realize that it probably wasn't all your doing. 2008 was a banner year for me. It was horrible for everyone else, but it was a great year for me. We finished the building. I was honored with a Teacher Excellence Award. It was my 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. A good year. But as gratifying as all that was, it came and went. I appreciated it. I moved on.

Holy people, like Thomas More, took both the bad and the good in their lives. No matter what happened, no matter how they succeeded, no matter the evil that befalls them, they stay on course. I have been blessed to have been at the Tower of London where Thomas More was executed and while there, I remembered how he mounted the scaffold where he was to be martyred and calmly said: I die the king's faithful servant, but God's first.

I can only hope, when people want my head, (and they will) I can be steady, that I can be a man for all seasons.