

Homily for the Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
St. Joseph's Neier October 25-26, 2014
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: When we are loved, it changes us to live our way into a new way of thinking.

*For they themselves openly declare about us
what sort of reception we had among you,
and how you turned to God from idols
to serve the living and true God*

Sabes, que, mijo? Te digo una cosa...

You know what my son? I am going to tell you something...

Speedy could have been another statistic, a victim of the streets of LA. He came out of an environment of alcoholism, brokenness and dysfunction. As Fr. Gregory Boyle, the author of the book *Tattoos on the Heart* said: "he negotiated the land-mines that were regularly detonated during his childhood." But, and this is a happy story, Speedy survived and it all was initiated by a simple good word.

Sabes, que, mijo? Te digo una cosa...

Speedy liked taking chances. He got his nickname by boldly going into areas of rival gangs and surviving. He even told the author that he doesn't care if he lives or dies. One night he was taking a girl home, a girl who lived in the wrong neighborhood where Speedy's mortal enemies live. It was like West Side Story only more dangerous. As he turns a corner he encounters eight rival gang members. "Hello, Speedy!" They give chase. They throw everything and anything they can at him. He escapes. Barely.

As he nears the safety of his own neighborhood he crosses paths with Yolanda, a woman from the church. She knows that Speedy is in the wrong place. She knows that Speedy has just avoided serious injury, if not death. She knows. And so she calls him: *Ven, mijo. Que estas haciendo aqui?* Come here, my son. What are you doing here? Speedy, winded and now somewhat ashamed, lowers his head. *Sabes, que, mijo? Te digo una cosa...* You know what my son? I am going to tell you something...

Though she barely knows him she says: "I've seen you in the park with your nephew. What a good uncle you are. I've seen you feed the homeless at the church. What a good and generous thing that is. Pero, te digo una cosa I am going to tell you something, if anything happened to you, it would break my heart in two."

Boyle finishes the story by saying that Speedy related the story to him and said, (I have cleaned the language up a bit) that STUFF made me feel good. “What could be tinier in the scope of human relations than the tender mercy of this stranger, rubbing salve on the wounds of this kid’s hopeless heart? You can almost hear the armor fall away and clank to the ground.”

I would like to believe that in all of our lives, there have been Yolandas. (That sounds somewhat strange doesn’t it?) But you know what I mean. There have been people there who have given you the good word, given you that undeserved love, given you the salve to stroke your hopeless heart. Maybe it was a parent. Maybe it was a sibling. Maybe it was a teacher that saw more in you than you were able to see in yourself. Maybe it was a coach. Maybe it was a priest. Maybe it was, like Speedy’s was, a random person you haphazardly ran into in a moment of panic. They are the people who strip away the useless armor we think we need around ourselves; armor we believe is necessary for protection, necessary for security, necessary for defense, but only serves to block out grace and love.

Luckily for Speedy, he cannot outrun God’s grace. His encounter with Yolanda changes him. Eventually he gets married, has children, finds a job away from the chaos of the old neighborhood, settles down. His Sundays are downright boring now. They go to Mass and then afterwards head to Barnes and Noble where they all go to read. He says he is too cheap to buy the books, so every Sunday they just pick up where they left off.

Speedy’s children hound him to buy a Harry Potter book. They turn off the TV now. Speedy sits in his recliner as his oldest daughter reads a page out loud. His next child, a son, then takes the book and reads a paragraph. The baby then gets the book and with the help of his siblings reads a sentence. And that’s how the book is read: page, paragraph, sentence, page, paragraph, sentence, page, paragraph, sentence.

As Speedy tells the story, his eyes well up with tears. His life is not at all that boring, it is actually quite beautiful.

I would ask you to reflect on the people you know. Some of them may lead reckless, chaotic, inattentive lives. They may need you to speak that word of hope, that word of life, that word of God grace. To help them turn away from the way of death, from the way of idols as Paul says, to turn to the way of page, paragraph and sentence, to turn to the way of life.

Sabes, que, mijo? Te digo una cosa...

You know what, kid? I am going to tell you something...

To whom are *you* going to tell something...

