

## Homily for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

The following story is told by one man: “Everyone in the apartment complex I lived in knew who Ugly the Cat was. Ugly loved three things in the world: fighting, eating garbage, and shall I say, love. The combination of these things, combined with a life spent outside, had their effect on Ugly. To start with, he had only one eye, and where the other should have been was a gaping hole. He was also missing his ear on the same side. His left foot appeared to have been badly broken once, and had healed at an unnatural angle, making him look like he was always turning the corner. His tail for quite some time has been missing, being left with just a tiny stump which he would constantly jerk and twist. And to top it all off, Ugly was covered in sores, disguising his tabby fur.

Now, every time someone saw Ugly, it was always the same reaction: “That’s one ugly cat!” All the children were warned not to touch him. Some adults even threw rocks at him or tried to use a hose to chase him away. But Ugly always had the same response. He would stand there, and not move until the cruel stranger gave up on the hose and the rocks and left him alone.

Whenever Ugly saw children, he would come running excitedly and bump his head against their hands to be pet. If you picked him up, he immediately began suckling on your shirt, or ears, whatever he could find.

One day, Ugly wanted to share his love with the neighbor's Huskies.

Unfortunately, they didn't respond so kindly, and he was badly mauled. From my apartment, I could hear his cries. Looking out the window and seeing what was happening, I rushed to his aid. By the time I got there, Ugly was lying on the ground. It was obvious his poor life was coming to an end. So I carried him gently home. Along the way, I could hear him gasping and struggling. But then he turned his one golden eye toward me and I'm sure I could've hear the distinct sound of purring.

Never once did he try to bite or scratch me, or run away from me. Ugly just looked up at me, trusting me to somehow relieve his pain. Shortly after, he died in my arms before I could bring him inside. But as I sat there for a while, I realized something. Ugly taught me more about giving comfort and compassion than a thousand books or talk show specials ever could. Many people want to be richer, more successful, well liked, or beautiful. But for me, I will always try to be Ugly.”

Yeah, I know a tear-jerker. Usually I don't share these kind of things. But why has this story been shared so often? Why does it touch people so much? Could it be because we might feel a little bit like Ugly – a little broken down, maybe beat up, emotionally shabby? Perhaps. And then, maybe the comfort and compassion shown by the man speaks to us too, because we really desire such comforting. Perhaps. Or maybe we can't admit such a thing.

In leading a Novena for Pentecost, which you can find on our parish YouTube channel, I was reminded of one of the titles of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. God Himself wants to comfort us. But how can we be comforted if there is no trial or distress of difficulty from which to be comforted?

You know, God did not create suffering, nor illness, nor pandemics, nor death. He doesn't delight in these things. There're realities of living in a broken world, where the mystery sin, stretching all the way back to Adam and Eve, reverberates throughout human history with a destructive ripple effect. Such stuff is not good. But, God is good. And so He desires to bring forth good from everything, even the bad stuff, like the times of ugliness in life. Look at Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross.

It's in moments such as these where words in our second reading today begin to make sense: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." What! How is that a good? Since when is it a "blessing" to suffer? Isn't suffering bad? Exactly! But, when we do end up suffering, and there is no way to avoid it – personally, in our families, societally – there is a powerful opportunity to experience the blessing of being comforted. In such vulnerable times – often where the answers to questions are few and far between – we come to realize our finiteness, our limitations, that we are not all-sufficient, that we are not gods, and we let God be who He is – in that moment, our Comforter.

And, as a loving Father, this is what God desires to do for us, His beloved children – comfort us. No parent can take away suffering from their child’s life. But, in love, they can certainly be there to comfort them in their times of need. Oh yes, we can try alcohol, drugs, the Internet, shopping, binging, or so many other things to try to give us the comfort we’re looking for. But, they really don’t work at all.

So, whether the time for you is now, or long over-due, or comes to you down the road at some time, let yourself be comforted by God. Seek Him out in prayer. Cry out to Him with your problems. Turn them all over to Him. And just ask Him to help you in your need. Then, let Him truly comfort you. God bless you.