

**1st Sun Lent C
Handicapped Baseball Player**

Introduction...

Lent is upon us. Lent is a wonderful time of year...
a time of preparation of Catechumens to enter our Church...
a time for all of us to ask, "How are we doing?" in our journey with the Lord.
Are we staying close to Jesus?
Are we trying to follow in his footsteps?
What in our lives do we need God's help to change?

Refrain... Have Mercy O Lord, Have Mercy on Us

I Today's Gospel

Today's Gospel tells us the story of the temptations of Jesus.
Isn't it comforting to know that even Jesus was tempted?
Jesus becomes one of us – Jesus is God's embrace of us.
Jesus was God's beloved, trying to do His loving Father's will.
Jesus was like us in all things, except sin.
In today's Gospel Jesus was tempted to be something he was not.
The devil told him, "You can turn stone into bread... Think of what a hit you'll
be with common people."
The devil told him, "You can jump from the Temple Mount and not get hurt...
Think how that will impress people."
The devil told him, "You can make others bow to your power... Think about
that for awhile."

But Jesus would not buy into these quick steps to success...
He would rather treat people with compassion,
share meals with sinners,
and teach his disciples God's way of living.
His was not a simple way, but a loving way.

Refrain... Have Mercy O Lord...

II Our Temptations

What are our temptations?

To win in all competitions?

To always shine forth, even at the expense of others?

To always have the right answers?

To always seem to be in control?

Do we recognize our own handicaps...

and that God loves us, even with our handicaps...

even the handicaps, which don't show?

Are we willing to reach out to others with compassion and understanding?

Let me tell you a story:

The Handicapped Hero

At a fundraising dinner for a school that serves learning-disabled children, the father of one of the students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended.

The father told his story. "I believe that when a child like Shay, physically and mentally handicapped comes into the world, an opportunity to realize true human nature presents itself, and it comes in the way other people treat that child."

Then he told the following story:

Shay and his father had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they'll let me play?"

Shay's father knew that most of the boys would not want someone like Shay on their team, but the father also understood that if his son were allowed to play, it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging and some confidence to be accepted by others in spite of his handicaps.

Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked (not expecting much) if Shay could play. The boy looked around for guidance and said, "We're losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him in to bat in the ninth inning."

Shay struggled over to the team's bench and, with a broad smile, put on a team shirt. His father watched with a small tear in his eye and warmth in his heart. The boys saw the father's joy at his son being accepted. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the right field. Even though no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be in the game and on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. Now, with two outs and the bases

loaded, the potential winning run was on base and Shay was scheduled to be the next batter.

At this juncture, do they let Shay bat and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball.

However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher, recognizing that the other team was putting winning aside for this moment in Shay's life, moved in a few steps to lob the ball in softly so that Shay could at least make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly towards Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball right back to the pitcher.

The game would now be over. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could have easily thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have been the end of the game.

Instead, the pitcher threw the ball right over the first baseman's head, out of reach of all the teammates. Everyone from the stands and both teams started yelling, "Shay, run to first!" never in his life had Shay ever run that far, but he made it to first base, He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled.

Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!" Catching his breath, Shay awkwardly ran towards second, gleaming and struggling to make it to the base. By the time Shay rounded towards second base, the right fielder had the ball... the smallest guy on their team who now had his first chance to be the hero for his team. He could have thrown the ball to the second-baseman for the tag, but he understood the pitcher's intentions so he, too, intentionally threw the ball high and far over the third-baseman's head. Shay ran toward third base deliriously as the runners ahead of him circled the bases toward home.

All were screaming, "Shay, Shay, Shay, all the Way Shay."

Shay reached third base because the opposing shortstop ran to help him by turning him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third! Shay, run to third!"

As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams, and the spectators, were on their feet screaming, "Shay, run home! Run home!" Shay ran to home, stepped on the plate, and was cheered as the hero who hit a grand slam and won the game for his team.

"That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of true love and humanity into this world."

Shay didn't make it to another summer. He died that winter, having never forgotten being the hero and making his father so happy, and coming home and seeing his mother tearfully embrace her little hero of the day.

Questions for us:

If we were the pitcher in that little league baseball game, would we have helped Shay get a hit?

If we were the right fielder, or the shortstop, would we have helped Shay run all the way home?

Or would we have wanted to win the game,
have the glory for ourselves,
and thought "how wonderful we are?"

What do you think Jesus would have done?

Deep down in each of us God's grace is working to help transform us into other Christ's...to be people of compassion, understanding and care... We all need to be transformed... and that's what Lent is all about.

At Easter time we will renew our Baptismal vows... our promises to live like Christ in our world – a world that so often tempts us to other values... self-centered self-pampering, and entertained consumerism.

That's why we need to pray...

Response... Have Mercy O Lord...

Conclusion

As we continue with this Mass we will offer ourselves at the Offertory to our Loving Father, along with Jesus.

We will then remember Jesus' love for us, poured out on the Cross.

At Communion time Jesus wants to come into our hearts,
to remind us of his great love for us,
to continue transforming our hearts and our lives,
and to have us love him in return.

And so we pray...

Jesus, we love you.

Help us Lord.

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

Transform our hearts.

Help us to become like you.

Give us strength to overcome our temptations,
to recognize *our* faults and handicaps,
and to turn ourselves over to your loving and healing care.

We pray...

Response... Have Mercy O Lord..