

Oct. 10 & 11, 2015  
Columbus Day Weekend

All Saints Parish, Syracuse  
Fr. Fred Daley

### Letting Go of the Orange

Do you remember the story of how to catch a monkey? African hunters have the answer:

The first step is to cut a coconut in two and hollow it out. Next: in one half of the shell, cut out a hole –

just large enough for a monkey's hand to fit through. Then: place an orange in the other half of the coconut before sealing the two halves back together. Finally, hang the coconut from a tree with a rope and proceed into the bushes to wait.

When a monkey comes along, it will discern the sweet smell of the orange, climb-up the tree, put its hand into the coconut and grab the orange. The monkey will soon find that the orange is too big to get through the small hole; but it will keep its fist around the orange and refuse to let go. The hunters simply put a net over the monkey and rest is history... .

The only way the monkey could have saved its life – was to let go and flee ... ..

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “You know the Commandments: you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery;” ... and the list goes on.

“ ‘I’ve kept all these things since my youth.’ Looking at him with love, Jesus said: ‘You are lacking in one thing. Go sell what you have – give to the poor and you’ll have treasures in heaven - and come follow me.’ At that statement his face fell and the young man went away sad, for he had many possessions...

He was holding on to his possessions so tightly – like the monkey and the orange – he just couldn’t imagine letting go of them.

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Sisters and brothers, most of us have been taught that this familiar Gospel story is primarily about HOW to get to heaven and to how to AVOID going to hell. And, the story makes us a bit uncomfortable – because most of us have many possessions and – from a global perspective – we’re pretty rich.

But if we look a little closer at this story, we see that the young man is not lacking in what it takes to get to heaven. Jesus assures him, that he achieved the goal of getting to heaven by keeping the Commandments... .

What Jesus is saying to the young man is that he’s lacking in something which will help him achieve fulfillment in this life – right here and now, long before he inherits eternal life.

As the young man disappears into the distance, Jesus reflects on his refusal to take a life changing step of discipleship. “How hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God. It’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich, to enter the kingdom of God.” What Jesus is saying is that a wealthy individual, as long as he or she insists on holding on to their wealth for life – like the monkey holding on to the orange – has the chance of a snowball in Hell of experiencing God working effectively in their everyday life. Why? The money becomes a god... .

Jesus is teaching us that putting people in the forefront of our lives and relegating money and power to the background is an essential component of the repentance – the change demanded if we’re going to be a disciple. Jesus is teaching that we’ll never notice God present and working in our day-to-day lives, without first of all: *letting go of the orange!*

Sisters and brothers, in this Gospel story, Jesus is focusing on our lives here and now – not on what’s going to happen when we die. The late Scripture Scholar Marcus Borg, emphasizes in his classic book Speaking Christian, that the Church, the teaching and rules, has done a great disservice to Jesus and to us – by reducing his ministry to simply learning how to avoid Hell and get into Heaven. Jesus is much more concerned about our lives here and now: “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven”!

When Jesus spoke about “being saved,” as he does in today’s Gospel story, he’s referring to the quality of life he wanted his followers to experience right here – right now, not the life we hope to receive after our physical death.

Brothers and sisters, most of us, probably all of us here, are living pretty good lives: keeping the Commandments: “Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal...” Our chances of getting to heaven are pretty good – most, probably assured – and our chances of going to hell (if there is a hell – but that’s another Homily!) are probably nil.

But, Jesus is inviting us, not to just live good lives (that can be pretty boring); but abundant lives, fulfilled lives, fruitful lives, happy and joyous – even in the midst of our struggle and crosses that are part of life.

The key question for our reflection in today’s Gospel story is what orange or oranges am I holding on to with all my strength, that is keeping me from living an abundant life and joyful life ... a fulfilled life?

- Is money my orange?
- Is the pursuit of material things my orange?
- Is the need to control my orange?
- Is the hunger for power my orange/
- Is the pursuit of being accepted, being liked by people my orange?
- Is being jealous and envious of others, or what another possesses my orange?
- Is an addiction to a substance ... to sex ... to a relationship ... or to whatever, my orange?
- Is holding on to un-forgiveness, being eaten up with resentment and hatred toward another my orange?

- Is holding on and being victimized by those false messages that told us we are not good enough, that we're not okay, that we're really 'less-than' my orange?
- ... and the list goes on...

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I think one of the reasons Pope Francis is so popular is that he speaks to our hearts, in a gentle but firm way that calls us to let go of those oranges... those false gods that keep us from living the *joy of the Gospel*: an abundant, fulfilled and fruitful life as individuals, communities, nations and global community. And, in the midst of our upside-down priorities, we so often prevent other individuals from being able to live – fulfilled, abundant lives with dignity.

Pope Francis' mission statement – his Exhortation entitled The Joy of the Gospel – is a blueprint of how to let go of the orange in order to discover meaningful lives as disciples.

In ¶ 2, he states:

*“The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of God’s love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.”*

Brothers and sisters, let us listen with the ear of our heart and let us pray for the gift to let go of the orange; ... to Let Go and Let God!

Amen