

Sunday, August 5, 2012
Mass for College Students at Loretto, PA
Homily

I heard a story about a psychology professor who conducted an unusual experiment with 100 college freshmen. In order to get 100 participants he promised free food.

The experiment was really simple. They brought groups of ten students into a room for a test. Each group of ten was instructed to raise their hands when the professor pointed to the longest line on three separate charts.

One person in each group did not know that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line.

The experiment began with professor pointing to the shortest line on the chart. No one raised their hand. Then the professor pointed to the second-longest line and immediately nine students raised their hands.

The one student who did not know what was going on would typically look around at all of the students who kept their hands raised, then with a confused look would slowly raise his or her hand with the group.

The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. Each time a card was raised, the uninformed student would raise his or her hand as soon as the other nine raised their hands, even though that student knew it was not the correct answer.

The experiment was repeated 3 times with ten groups. Each group had one student who did not know about the plan. The same thing happened in about 75% of the cases; the uninformed student went along with the other nine.

After the experiment was finished these freshman were asked if they were aware that they were choosing the wrong answer. They said yes. Then they were asked why they did that. They said that they were afraid not to because the nine others answered that way. A few even said they thought they had to answer that way or they wouldn't get the free food.

I can tell you are probably thinking

- Are you serious?
- Who could be so ridiculous?
- You mean they did that for free food?

But let's get serious for a moment. I want you to think about a couple of questions and I want you to start thinking about the answer. Don't worry. I'm not going to ask you to share your answers with everyone.

Here's the first question: what were you looking for when you came here this evening? It's an important question that comes from today's Gospel reading.

- Some of the people who followed Jesus to Capernaum wanted to know where's the food? Where's the bread?
- Some wanted to know what sign Jesus could perform?

They had heard the news from last Sunday's Gospel reading; that Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish and he fed thousands of people. Their friends were all talking about it. Check it out! Free food! Are you serious?! What college freshman wouldn't make the trip over to Capernaum for free food?!

Of course you wouldn't go along just because everyone else was talking it up, right?

They heard that when Jesus distributed the food there was so much that everyone had as much as they wanted and there were even leftovers. Leftovers! If they have that much food at a party I'm in; right?

They showed up at Capernaum and Jesus was right there. So they asked him "When did you get here? Did we miss anything?"

Now if you paid attention to the Gospel reading we just heard, you can tell right away that Jesus had them all figured out. He called them on it right away. He said, "You're here because nine other freshman told you about the loaves and the fish. But that's not what it's all about."

So they started talking more with Jesus trying to find out what's going on. After going back and forth with them for awhile, Jesus finally says, "You

want food? I will give you bread from heaven. I will give you food so that you will never be hungry.”

I can see some parents here and they’re thinking, “They will never be hungry? I can save a lot of money not having to pay for food while they are in college! I’m calling the university tomorrow and tell them to cancel the meal plan!”

But let’s get back to the Gospel reading.

This crowd that missed the big miracle last week said to Jesus, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? A whole bunch of our friends went for this stupid psychology experiment and all they got was a couple of cookies and a glass of lemonade. They felt like idiots for doing that experiment.”

Then Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you." That means, “Pay attention. I’m going to tell you something really serious now.”

So Jesus told them, “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

So they said to him, "Please, give us this bread always."

Then Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

Imagine that! Free food forever! Never hungry and never thirsty!

Do you think that you can find that on campus this semester? I am pretty sure that you know what Jesus is talking about is available to you right now. It’s been available to you since the time you were baptized.

But you know the saying, “Don’t leave home without it.” I want to take a minute to talk about that; where you are coming from and where you are headed.

Where you are headed is going to be a new phase in your life that is really awesome in so many ways. But in order to survive and to really thrive during your time in college, you can’t just leave behind everything you have

learned and received at home, at school, at Church. You can't forget about all the good stuff that has brought you to this time in life.

Here are the most important things that you should not leave home when you head off to college.

- Remember who you are.
 - You are a human person and every human person is made in the image and likeness of God. You have an awesome dignity. It's a gift from God and God wants that gift to be your core for your whole life.
 - As part of that awesome human dignity you have a mind, a body, and a soul to take care of. Don't take that for granted and don't let others take that for granted.
- Take care of yourself. What do I mean? I hate to remind you, but your Mom is right.
 - A little pizza or ice cream once in awhile is OK, but you really do need to eat healthy.
 - And even though you might stay up late once in awhile and get up 5 minutes for your first class, you need to get plenty of sleep at night.
 - If you don't eat healthy and get enough sleep, your brain will not work; and guess what? You do need your brain to function when you are at college.
- Something else that goes along with taking care of yourself. Stay away from sex, drugs, drinking and smoking.
 - Do I really have to explain that to you? If you want me to, I would simply have to tell you the real stories from young people who came to see me so messed up; so stressed out; or so unhappy after getting high or drunk at some party and being used for some someone else's sexual gratification or even using someone else for their gratification.
 - I am not talking about it being wrong just because that's what God tells us. I am talking also about how that kind of self-indulgence will demolish your awesome human dignity or the dignity of someone else.
- Be careful who you make friends with at college.
 - You are going to meet a lot of new people and hopefully many of them will be good. Some of them will be friends for life. I

certainly have been blessed with friends that go back to my years in high school and college.

- It will absolutely happen that you will be tempted to make decisions based on what everyone else is doing. You may say that won't happen to me. Right? Just ask the 75% of the freshman who raised their hand even when it was not the right answer. They did it because they were afraid not to when they saw everyone else doing it. Just think about what happens if the crowd you hang out with doesn't have the best judgment. In that situation things can get out of control so fast you may not even have a chance to realize what's happening until there is already some kind of trouble.
- Remember why you are at college.
 - The crowd followed Jesus to Capernaum because they heard about last week's miracle; something really big. You are going to college in search of something really big; in search of job skills, and information, and knowledge, and I almost forgot: truth. That's right. Even if you graduate with a 4.0 and you don't find the truth while you are in college; you didn't get your money's worth.
 - It means you have to study. And don't study just to get a 4.0; study so that you can learn; and learn so you can grow in awareness of who you really are and what you can and should be in our world. Remember your identity; your God-given dignity as a human person.
- Don't leave your Catholic faith at home.
 - I tell young people like you all the time how awesome you are and how proud I am of you because of your faith. I mean look around. You are here for this special Mass, right? And what is it about that faith that I am talking about?
 - Let's go back to the crowd of freshman who showed up in Capernaum when they heard about the big miracle they missed last Sunday. I really give them a lot of credit. Do you know why? It says in the Gospel that they were talking with Jesus; they were asking him lots of questions.
 - That's awesome! It's something that you already know how to do. It's called prayer. You need to do that every day, even while you are in college. It is so important that we have something for you at the end of Mass to help you with that.

- After talking and asking Jesus questions, the crowd at Capernaum listened to what Jesus had to say and it is very clear from what he said that Jesus cared about them so much that he wanted to tell them the truth.
- So how can you listen to Jesus? That's what we do when we read the Bible; it's the Word of God. You need to do that while you are in college. I know that you will have a lot of reading to do with your studies, but I challenge you and encourage you to read the Bible for just 5 minutes a day. And I know how much college books cost, so if you don't have a Bible and you promise me that you want to read the Bible, let me know. I will buy you a Bible.
- Then in that story when all these college freshman headed over to Capernaum to find Jesus and they told him how hungry they were, the Gospel reading today tells us that Jesus fed them with the Bread of Life. In case you missed it he's talking especially about the Holy Eucharist.
- So when you get to college, you need to get to Mass every Sunday; maybe even more often during the week. In case you don't know, in most colleges and universities they have Mass in the afternoon or even on Sunday evening so you can actually sleep-in that day.
- And I don't have to remind you what goes along with that do I? It's the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. Yes, you need that too because Jesus also wants to feed one of the deepest hungers that we have; the hunger for mercy; for forgiveness; for reconciliation, for peace in our hearts.
- The sacrament of Penance is so awesome. It's the antidote for our failures and trust me, when you go away to college and experience all that freedom and you are not too careful in exercising the responsibility that goes with it, there are bound to be failures. But you know that already; we all learned it in 2nd or 3rd grade; it's called sin.
- Prayer, the Word of God, the Sacraments. Don't leave home with out them. They are all about staying connected with the ultimate friend that all of us would ever want; Jesus Christ. He is your friend, your savior, your strength, your peace, your hope, and as he says in the Gospel today, he is your life. A joyful life, a fulfilled life, an eternal life.

So you are going to college for the first time or you may be returning for another semester. I wish you all the best. I'm praying for you and for your parents who are going to be worried that it all goes well for you. They would love to tell you some of the stuff I'm saying, but they also worry that you might not listen to them.

So please listen to me one more time. Its my last word of advice.

If you see a poster on campus advertising free food for freshmen if they participate in a psychology experiment or if they are invited to a keg party, please be careful. You wouldn't go in there and make the wrong choice just because everyone else in the group does it. Right?

There is only one poster you ought to be watching for on campus. You won't find it on a bulletin board. It's already hand-written right here, in your heart. It's not an invitation from the psychology department or a frat house. It's a very personal and awesome and real message from Jesus Christ.

The message is very simple. It says, "Welcome to college. Take good care of yourself. Enjoy it, but don't get too carried away. Find the right people as you make new friends. Study, eat well, and get enough rest. And don't forget me. I am right here with you. Don't leave home without me."

Everybody got it? God bless you college students!