

Homily -Twenty-fourth Sunday of Year B – Letting go

Dominos is a game that you win by losing all the pieces.

The Christian life is this experience: you win by losing, by letting go of what you have.

Jesus says: *He who saves his life will lose it; he who loses his life will save it.* He is referring to the **detachment** we must achieve on our spiritual journey during which we are called to let go of all we possess so that we may be possessed by God, and share God's life.

What are we to let go? This will vary from person to person and we each have to ask that question of ourselves. But for example, it may be...

Things It is very easy to become acquisitive - and then dependent - on certain items, comforts or luxuries that we are loath even to share, never mind give up – certain personal 'treasures', certain 'precious' belongings. But we can become captive to them. As the singer puts it: *A man gets tied up to the ground – he gives the world its saddest sound.*

Opinions We may well be called upon to forego our own views; or to allow room for another point of view: to accommodate, go along with, even *promote* another person's ideas. This may go against the grain, but it may well be to our benefit in the long run.

Choices If I am in the habit of asserting my own will then it may well be salutary for me to let others have their way on occasion. More important still is to let God have God's way with us. *Speak, Lord for your servant is listening – not listen Lord for your servant is speaking.* This may require us to be willing to amend our plans, our projects – even abandon them altogether.

Dreams Certainly it is good to have dreams, aspirations, a vision. And, as the poet says, *Hold fast to dreams for if dreams die life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly; hold fast to dreams for if dreams go life is a barren field frozen with snow.*

But it can happen that we become obsessed by our dreams, possessed by our enterprises and schemes to the extent that other aspects of our life, such as important relationships begin to suffer. So it may be better for us to let our dreams go.

People There are certainly relationships that are rightly dear to us – such as that of a parent to their child – but yet good parents come to realise that they must in due course allow their child to live outside of their control so that they may grow to maturity, or so that God can evoke from them the response - the way of life - that God wants.

Some relationships have to be forgone because actually they are bad for us; there may be a particular person that we have to let go - so that a marriage may be saved, children securely supported, or a vocation to the religious life or the priesthood be truly wholehearted. Our conscience lets us know when that is the case, unless we have muffled its voice because in our self-indulgence we want things to carry on just as they are. Perhaps we are afraid of being lonely.

The fact is that people are God's gift to us: they may be a blessing, or they may be a challenge – but often it can be that God takes them back, at which time we should be able to say with Job: *The Lord gives and the Lord takes away: blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Good Works are required of us if we are to truly live out our faith, as the Apostle James reminds us: we are to have an active charity, a commitment to justice and peace.

But sometimes the Lord calls us to leave a particular ministry, valuable though it is, and venture into new responsibilities – as with Mother Theresa of Calcutta who left her convent school teaching the daughters of the rich to go out into the streets and begin her work for the poorest of the poor.

Sometimes it is best for us to hand over our work to others who can bring their own giftedness to bear.

We can also be invited by God to leave particular forms of *prayer* or to engage in different forms of *worship* - to try *fresh approaches* so as to sustain a lively relationship with the Lord. We all find security in the familiar, but God can and does ask us to venture into the unknown.

This is true not only for individuals but also for the Christian community. God calls us ever onward: the Church cannot stand still. We have a wonderful heritage but we must not become fettered by it.

And finally...

Life itself We all (naturally) cling to life. But we are asked to be ready to abandon it. Some do with great generosity for the sake of a special person – *no one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.* Many (the martyrs) have done this for the love of God, for 'the faith'.

We are all called to the final letting go. In death we are to leave our familiar life behind – trustingly, confidently, fearlessly. To give back to God what God gave us. All the other 'losings' on our spiritual journey are a preparation for that ultimate test of faith. And in that last trusting we will be lifted up into a new kind of life altogether:

I am going to prepare a place for you, says the Lord, and then I will return to take you with me so that where I am you shall be too...there is no need to be afraid.