

I went to Mass in Canon City recently and it just happened that the Deacon of the parish there was retiring that day. He wore a T-Shirt that said: "Catholic. It's not a religion, It's a relationship." ... That message was in our First Reading, when God tells Isaiah to tell his people: "[A]s a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

Generally a mother's love for a child is a close relationship; it's faithful love no matter what. So when we hear this comparison of God to a loving mother, we can be confident of God's unfailing love for us, no matter how bad things look. Every human life experiences some setbacks, but we're in God's arms throughout those storms. God still cares about us and stays with us and will turn things around.

God is always open to a relationship with us, but for us it takes practice, because we're so easily distracted. It takes gratitude. Being grateful, thankful, reminds us the Creator of the Universe never forgets about any of us. If we maintain an awareness of God's interest in us and love for us, we'll experience a joy that can get us through any hardships or suffering.

So take a few minutes every day to count some of our blessings: maybe on the way to work, or while waiting in line somewhere. When we direct our thoughts to God's goodness, think about the good things we've received from God and the prospect of resurrected life – we can put the tough things that happen to us in perspective.

Look at Cardinal Francis Van Thuan, who was Bishop of Saigon after the Communists took over South Vietnam. He spent 13 years in prison – 9 of them in solitary confinement. His relationship with God got him through. What mattered was working for God, even when that work could only be prayer, and his prayer was gratitude.

When we're grateful to God, then we can become a source of joy and strength for others. When we experience the peace that comes from knowing God loves us like a mother, we can bring that peace to others. We can be blessings for others; a saving grace for others; we can reduce tensions and stress for others.

Christ never gives up on us. He knows from experience how hard this life can be. Bring his message of encouragement to the people who need to hear it: our families, our neighbors, our classmates or co-workers. It's not about making headlines. Mother Theresa made that point to a guy who wanted to do something for Christ, He was saddened by the problems in the world and said to Mother Theresa "What can I do?" ... And she said, "Pick up a broom."

The biggest threat to our relationship with God is the temptation of discouragement. It can make us depressed, or give up hope, even paralyze us from doing anything. That's why in today's Gospel, Jesus prepares his disciples for it. He says get ready for difficulties, rejection, and apparent failure. And Jesus speaks from experience. He couldn't convince the Pharisees to follow him; he experienced more rejection than acceptance in his ministry. ... So we shouldn't expect anything different. Jesus says when we're living out our faith, don't let apparent failures bother us. Just move on. Shaking the dust off your feet (or foot) is optional.

When obstacles and failures appear, don't give in to the temptation of discouragement.

Don't fall for Satan's lies during those times: that Jesus is disappointed with us; that we're not good for anything; that we did something wrong. Discouragement only results when our expectations aren't fulfilled. They're not God's. Let 'em go, and move on.

The purpose of our lives is to have a relationship with God, to build up his kingdom through the small things we do, which taken together make a big difference. God loves us like a mother. Let's sweep away our discouragement, so we can sweep away others', too, and have a great relationship with God.

Fr. John Ozella, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 7, 2019